

IN AND OUT

A Screenplay

by

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1.
IN BLACK:

We hear the VOICE OF MIKE STURGO, a high school jock, singing Cole Porter's "It's De-Lovely," to an amateur PIANO accompaniment. Mike is doing his best, but the rendition is pretty clunky.

MIKE (V.O.)

THE NIGHT IS YOUNG, THE SKIES ARE CLEAR
SO IF YOU WANT TO GO WALKING, DEAR
IT'S DELIGHTFUL, IT'S DELICIOUS, IT'S
DE-LOVELY

FADE IN ON:

EXT. GREENLEAF - DAY

As Mike CONTINUES to sing, we see a postcard-pretty small town, FROM ABOVE. It is a glorious spring day, the sun shining, not a cloud in the sky.

MIKE (V.O.)

I UNDERSTAND THE REASON WHY
YOU'RE SENTIMENTAL 'CAUSE SO AM I
IT'S DELIGHTFUL, IT'S DELICIOUS, IT'S
DE-LOVELY

We TRAVEL through the town, beginning with an old-fashioned wooden sign by the roadside, which reads "WELCOME TO GREENLEAF, INDIANA -- A GREAT BIG SMALL TOWN." We CIRCLE the quaint town square, taking in the clapboard chapel and the brick town hall. Local folks greet one another as they go about their errands, push their children in strollers, or sit on benches, basking in the sleepy sunlight.

EXT. GREENLEAF HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A typical small town high school, either an old brick building or something low and suburban, with a football field out back.

MIKE (V.O.)

YOU CAN TELL AT A GLANCE
WHAT A SWELL NIGHT THIS IS FOR ROMANCE
YOU CAN HEAR DEAR MOTHER NATURE
MURMURING LOW --
"LET YOURSELF GO!"

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

The high school drama club is rehearsing onstage in the otherwise empty auditorium. About twelve students are present; most of the guys have been roped in by their girlfriends. The students, all seniors, include MEREDITH SCULLEY, an earnest, idealistic cheerleader, in uniform, her best friend VICKY RAYBURN, an earthy, gossip-hungry type, and Meredith's boyfriend JACK CARNEY, a good-looking, straightforward jock.

Running the rehearsal is HOWARD BRACKETT, an English teacher. Howard wears a tweed sport coat and a bowtie; he is attractive and a terrific teacher. He is generous and good-natured, if something of a control freak; he likes everything in his life to be just so.

Howard watches as MIKE continues attempting to sing and dance, using a top hat and cane; Mike wears sweat-clothes. Mike is stocky and suspicious of the song; he is clearly not cut out for Cole Porter.

MIKE
SO PLEASE BE SWEET, MY CHICKADEE
AND WHEN I KISS YOU JUST SAY TO ME...

HOWARD
(interrupting)
Mike?

MIKE
(stopping)
What?

HOWARD
Mike, I know this is just for the drama club's little graduation party, but I think we could use some -- panache.

MIKE
What?

HOWARD
Some Cole Porter pizazz. Champagne fizz. Savoir-faire.

MIKE
Huh?

VICKY
He means like -- do it better.

MIKE
(to Vicky)
I'm tryin'. Hey, you made me do this.

VICKY
Not like that.

MEREDITH
Show him, Mr. Brackett. You do it.

HOWARD
I couldn't. I'm just the faculty advisor. I can't perform. I couldn't possibly.

JACK
Leave him alone.

HOWARD
(quickly, eager
to perform)
Oh, alright.

Howard reaches for the top hat and cane; Mike is happy to surrender them, and moves off to the side.

HOWARD
(to the student
at the piano)
Maestro?

The accompaniment begins. Howard performs the number with great relish, really selling it; he has seen more than his share of musicals.

HOWARD
(singing)
THE NIGHT IS YOUNG, THE SKIES ARE CLEAR
SO IF YOU WANT TO GO WALKING, DEAR
IT'S DELIGHTFUL, IT'S DELICIOUS, IT'S
DELOVELY!

As Howard continues the song in V.O., we CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY

We see EMILY MONTGOMERY, Howard's fiancée, studying a bulletin board. Emily carries books and papers, and nibbles carrot sticks from a plastic bag. She is a pretty, shy, somewhat awkward woman.

On the bulletin board is a display with a banner reading "TEACHER OF THE YEAR?" Beneath the banner are two formally-posed photographs, one of a smiling Howard, with the caption "HOWARD BRACKETT, ENGLISH." Emily blows this picture a kiss. The second photo is of a slimy, unctuous man, with the label "EDWARD KENROW, ALGEBRA."

HOWARD (V.O.)
I UNDERSTAND THE REASON WHY
YOU'RE SENTIMENTAL 'CAUSE SO AM I
IT'S DELIGHTFUL, IT'S DELICIOUS, IT'S
DELOVELY!

Emily walks down the hall and smiles at a large poster of CAMERON DRAKE, a handsome young movie star. A hand-painted banner reads "OUR CAMERON! GREENLEAF '91! OSCAR NOMINEE!" Emily gives the poster a thumbs-up gesture.

INT. AUDITORIUM

Howard continues the number, singing and dancing all over the stage.

HOWARD
YOU CAN TELL AT A GLANCE
WHAT A SWELL NIGHT THIS IS FOR ROMANCE
YOU CAN HEAR DEAR MOTHER NATURE
MURMURING LOW --
"LET YOURSELF GO!"

ANGLE on Emily, slipping in the back door of the auditorium. Nibbling her snack, she stands in the aisle and watches Howard adoringly.

HOWARD
SO PLEASE BE SWEET, MY CHICKADEE
AND WHEN I KISS YOU JUST SAY TO ME
IT'S DELIGHTFUL, IT'S DELICIOUS, IT'S
DELECTABLE,
IT'S DELIRIOUS, IT'S DILEMMA, IT'S
DE-LIMIT,
IT'S DELUXE, IT'S DE-LOVELY!

Howard ends the number with a big finish, and the students hoot, whistle and applaud.

ANGLE on Emily, hanging back, but applauding vigorously.

EXT. BRACKETT HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

This is Howard's parents' home. It is a simple but decent-sized clapboard farmhouse; Howard's folks run a local dairy. There are trees and a rolling lawn and a barn. A bucolic but not extravagant setting. Howard's car drives up. Howard and Emily get out of the car.

INT. BRACKETT PARLOR

A family meeting is in progress. BERNIECE, Howard's mom, is in charge. She is sweet-natured, but with a five-star general's capacity for organization and resolve. She has a large hand-lettered version of the upcoming week's schedule hanging on the wall. Surrounding the schedule is Berniece's wedding shrine: an enormous, overflowing collage of photos, magazine pages and fabric swatches, all relating to brides, grooms, floral arrangements and churches. The shrine is Berniece's life's work; she uses a pointer as she discusses the week's activities.

FRANK, Howard's dad, sits in an armchair. Frank is a good husband and father, but not the most emotionally expressive person alive. WALTER, Howard's brother, sits in a corner of the couch, in coveralls and a baseball cap. Walter is a nice, goofy guy, completely lacking in ambition and skills. He's never quite found himself, and lives a bit in Howard's shadow; the family worries about Walter.

Howard and Emily sit side-by-side on the couch, holding hands.

BERNIECE
Has everyone got their schedules?

Everyone holds up thick xeroxed booklets.

BERNIECE
Tomorrow we have final fittings, and the relatives arrive. Wednesday is the rehearsal...

HOWARD
And the rehearsal dinner.

BERNIECE
Thursday is the bachelor party -- calm down, boys -- Friday we meet with the minister, Saturday we review menus, music and centerpieces, and Sunday -- ka-boom!

WALTER
That's the wedding, right? Ka-boom?

HOWARD
Yes, Walter.

BERNIECE
A Brackett wedding! I never thought I'd see the day. We were married in wartime, Emily.

HOWARD
We know.

BERNIECE
Frank wore his uniform, and I was in navy blue rayon.

EMILY
(in sympathy)
Rayon.

BERNIECE
It was City Hall and ship out.

FRANK
We had a job to do.

BERNIECE
And you were splendid, but I always dreamed of -- a wedding. With all the trimmings.

As Berniece begins her reverie, all three Brackett men begin to mime playing romantic violins.

BERNIECE
A cake and a choir and lilies of the
valley -- and roses. White roses
everywhere.

The violins reach a crescendo.

EMILY
(to the men)
Hush!

BERNIECE
And they're here. My roses -- and
not those trashy red ones. Not for
my Howard. Emily, you're a lucky
woman.

HOWARD
Mom. She knows that.

FRANK
We're proud of both our boys.
Howard, and Walter.

ANGLE on Walter, rocking on the couch, his gaze vacant. His
hand is absently tucked into the upholstery, searching for
change. He looks up.

WALTER
What?

BERNIECE
Maybe... someday.

Howard knocks on Walter's head -- "Knock on wood!"

WALTER
Quit it! Mom!

BERNIECE
Boys! But meanwhile, in just one
week...

EVERYONE
Ka-boom!

INT. FITTING ROOM - DAY

We are in the fitting room of the local, extremely small-time
department store. Emily stands on a platform, wearing her
traditional white wedding gown.

Howard and Berniece stand to either side of Emily, examining
her with critical eyes. A saleslady, MRS. TAMMY LESTER, stands
nearby.

BERNIECE
(thrilled)
You are just so beautiful...

HOWARD
That is exquisite...

MRS. LESTER
I still can't believe it.

EMILY
(staring at herself
in the mirror,
very unsure)
Me neither.

MRS. LESTER
When you walked in here last month, I
almost died. I didn't recognize you.

BERNIECE
She's worked very hard.

HOWARD
Isn't she a knock-out?

MRS. LESTER
But honey -- you were a house. No
offense.

BERNIECE
Tammy!

EMILY
No, she's right. I was a house. I
was a barn.

HOWARD
It was just baby fat...

EMILY
But when Howard set the date, I swore
-- I was not going to be a size 14
bride. I've been fat my whole life,
but I am not going to waddle down the
aisle. And when I saw that Richard
Simmons infomercial, remember, the
one where he snuck up behind that
woman who'd lost over 400 pounds,
with his tapes, and he hugged her,
and she couldn't stop crying?

MRS. LESTER
She was hungry.

BERNIECE
Tammy!

EMILY
I just said, if she can do it, so can
I.

(MORE)

9.
EMILY (CONT'D)

I just wish -- my folks were still here. They never thought I could do it. They never thought I'd get married.

BERNIECE

We're your family now. The Bracketts. And Richard Simmons.

MRS. LESTER

God bless him. In his little short pants. Is he coming to the wedding?

HOWARD

(very decisively)

No.

EXT. MINI-MALL - DAY

A group of at most three stores. A sign reads "GREENLEAF FORMAL WEAR -- WEDDINGS, PROMS, FUNERALS, ALL OCCASIONS."

INT. FORMAL WEAR STORE

The store is panelled in knotty pine, and tuxes hang on metal racks. There is a counter and a group of mirrors. Frank is trying on a plain black tux; he looks at himself in the mirror, grumpily. Howard surveys him. STAN FORREST, the store's owner, is also present; Stan is a can-do guy, in high-rise polyester pants and a wide tie.

FRANK

It's a straitjacket.

STAN

It's a classic, the J-12. Everybody in town's been by, revvin' up for your nuptials. Now, Howard, how about you?

HOWARD

Please. I own.

STAN

You own your own tuxedo?

HOWARD

I enjoy dressing appropriately.

FRANK

(regarding Howard,
with affection)

The bad seed.

Walter emerges from a fitting room.

He wears an electric-powder-blue, cheesy, prom-style tux, with a ruffled shirt and a velour bowtie; he has clearly been allowed to choose for himself. He is elated.

WALTER

Look at this!

STAN

"The Tormé."

HOWARD

Yes. And does that come with a prostitute?

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Berniece, Frank, Emily, Howard and Walter wait outside the local bus depot. A Greyhound approaches.

BERNIECE
Here they come! All those Bracketts!

FRANK
We don't have room.

WALTER
This is so cool. It's like a rock concert. Or a field trip.

ANGLE on the bus: the Brackett passengers have draped huge banners all over the bus, reading "HOWARD 'N' EMILY! FINALLY!" "AT LAST!" "WHEW!" with lots of hearts and pink ribbon. Various relatives hang out the windows, shouting greetings and blowing noisemakers. Featured will be the tart-tongued, skeptical AUNT BECKY and her crude, boisterous husband, UNCLE ROGER.

AUNT BECKY
(hanging out the window)
Howard! It's about time!

HOWARD
Aunt Becky! Welcome!

AUNT BECKY
(shocked at Emily's new figure)
Emily! What happened?

HOWARD
(showing off Emily)
Doesn't she look great?

EMILY
(blushing)
Stop!

The bus pulls in. At least twenty RELATIVES, all ages and sexes, all carrying luggage, begin to emerge, and everyone starts hugging.

BERNIECE

Susan!

COUSIN SUSAN

Berniece!

UNCLE ROGER

We're here! Hey, Emily -- heat up those sheets! Howard, what took you so long?

HOWARD

Well, we had to be sure.

UNCLE ROGER

You had to be old!

COUSIN HANNAH

Emily! Look at you! Someone's been sweatin' to the oldies!

EMILY

(shyly, but tickled)

Da-doo-ron-ron!

LITTLE ROGER

(6 years old)

Hi, Cousin Howard! Are you really getting married?

HOWARD

You bet!

LITTLE ROGER

When you got engaged, I wasn't even born!

Off Howard's reaction, we CUT TO:

EXT. GREENLEAF INN - NIGHT

This is the largest and nicest local restaurant, with a dining room used for special occasions.

INT. DINING ROOM

The rehearsal dinner is in progress. The room is packed, with relatives, friends and faculty from school.

At a long table at the front of the room is the family, with Howard and Emily at the center. The room and the tables are decorated with a fussy bridal theme.

ANGLE on Emily. She has an almost empty plate, except for a few carrot sticks. She looks yearningly at the luscious desserts which fill the table; she reaches out with her fork, catches herself, and jerks her hand back.

The room is buzzing with conversation. Howard stands and taps his water glass; the room quiets.

HOWARD

Thank you. All of you. In just three short days, Emily and I will be married. After three long years. You may all be asking yourselves, what was the problem?

AUNT BECKY

You said it.

HOWARD

And Aunt Becky, I have the answer. We were waiting for -- the perfect year. The perfect day. And of course, for Cameron Drake. I swore I would not be married until he was nominated for an Oscar. I thought I was safe.

(laughter)

But now, tonight is the night -- for Cameron, at least. And this Sunday will be -- the happiest day of my life.

Howard looks at Emily, who is caught reaching for a forkful of cake. She looks panicked, and then smiles adoringly at Howard.

EMILY

Me too!

HOWARD

So for now, we'll just thank you all for being here, and let you get home to your sets. Uncle Roger?

UNCLE ROGER

Howard, I just have one question -- if that Drake guy loses, you two are still getting married, right?

HOWARD

Of course.

EMILY

(relieved, as everyone laughs)

Of course.

HOWARD

But if Jodie loses...

EMILY
What?

HOWARD
Just kidding.

Howard gives Emily a kiss and everyone applauds.

INT. HOWARD'S CAR

Howard is driving Emily home after the rehearsal dinner. Emily is all but devouring a set of travel brochures.

EMILY
(thrilled)
I re-confirmed everything with the travel agent, our whole honeymoon. Howard, can you imagine? London, Paris, Rome -- oh my God. Wait. In Europe, do they have Nutrasweet?

HOWARD
Emily...

EMILY
I know, I know, I just want to be -- perfect. For you.

HOWARD
You are perfect.

EMILY
What made you decide? That this was -- our year?

HOWARD
It's time. Everything finally seems -- just right. In place. Our careers. Our future. The town. All there. All right there.

EMILY
(wistfully)
All right... here.

EXT. EMILY'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Emily lives in a small garden apartment complex, or perhaps in the top floor apartment of an older house. The car pulls up out front.

EMILY
Are you sure you won't come up?

HOWARD
I've told you, I could care less about that ridiculous show. I won't watch. It's nonsense.

EMILY
But it's Cameron. I had him.

HOWARD
What?

EMILY
Sophomore English. He used to come after school for extra help. The whole year. He would just look up at me, with those big puppy-dog eyes. We spent hours, just the two of us. This adorable boy and -- big old me.

HOWARD
Emily!

EMILY
Reciting "Romeo and Juliet." Can you believe that?

HOWARD
You're a beautiful woman. You always were. Why can't you believe that?

EMILY
Go. Pack.

EXT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Emily stands outside as Howard's car pulls away. She holds a centerpiece from the rehearsal dinner and looks a bit lost.

INT. BRACKETT FAMILY REC ROOM

This is the finished basement of the Brackett home, with a large entertainment center. The entire extended family has gathered to watch the Academy Awards, at least twenty people. They are seated on chairs, couches and pillows scrunched up on the floor. Everyone is buzzing.

Berniece enters, with a tray of popcorn and bridge mix. She wears a white rose corsage, and there are various bits of wedding decor throughout the room -- crepe paper bells, dried bouquets, etc. There is a large color photograph of Emily and Howard, trimmed with white crepe paper.

BERNIECE
Who wants Movie-style Buttery Lite?

Everyone wants some.

BERNIECE
Frank -- hadn't we better get the set warmed up? Have we all got our score cards? Pencils ready?

Everyone holds up xeroxed sheets and pencils.

AUNT BECKY
(to a cousin)
What do you have for Best
Documentary?

COUSIN GRETCHEN
Something about Polish mine workers,
and their struggle to be free.

UNCLE DIRK
I'm going with this one about the
retarded kids, building a dam.

AUNT BECKY
Did you see it?

UNCLE DIRK
Of course not!

COUSIN LINDA
Why don't they ever nominate anything
good? Like videos?

GREAT-AUNT MARGARET
I hope that nice Sally Field wins.

AUNT BECKY
But she's not nominated.

GREAT-AUNT MARGARET
Even so.

ANGLE on the set. Frank, in his recliner, has the remote. He
flips on the picture: we see a serious-looking NEWSCASTER,
perhaps PETER JENNINGS.

NEWSCASTER
Before we get to our Oscar-night pre-
show, we turn to events on the
international front. Today in
Bosnia...

EVERYONE IN THE ROOM
Change!

Frank changes the channel, to live coverage of the OSCARS.
Crowds stand in the bleachers, as guests and celebrities enter.
PETER MALLOY, a correspondent in an Armani tux, is doing his
Oscar night special. Peter is a terrific-looking man in his
thirties; he is quick-witted, professional and loves show biz.
He holds a microphone.

PETER
This is Peter Malloy for "Inside
Entertainment," welcoming you to the
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

COUSIN LINDA (O.S.)
Who was Dorothy Chandler?

GREAT-AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
She lived there.

EXT. OSCARS

We are now at the actual event in Los Angeles.

PETER
The excitement is mounting, and Cameron Drake hasn't even arrived yet. And here comes Drew Barrymore! No, I'm sorry, it's Winona Ryder! No, sorry again, oh my God -- it's Cher! She looks good!

EXT. ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

A beat-up looking local hangout on the highway. There is a satellite dish on the roof, and the parking lot is full.

PETER (V.O.)
And here comes Ralph Fiennes, one of our finest actors, and so often a nominee. Ralph, get over here! Pronounce your name!

INT. ROADHOUSE

The place is packed, with everyone watching the large TV which hangs over the bar. Walter sits at the bar, very close. Everyone is CHEERING.

WALTER
I love this show! But where's Cameron?

The bar starts CHANTING "Cam-ron! Cam-ron!"

EXT. OSCARS

PETER
And look, oh my, is it the guy everyone's been waiting for? Coming toward me, is that Cameron Drake? No, it's just Brad Pitt. Be nice!

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

Emily is wearing a flannel nightgown, and sitting on her bed, munching Snackwell's and watching a small portable TV. There is a treadmill in the corner of the room, draped with sweat-clothes. On Emily's wall is a poster of Cameron, surrounded by smaller photos and clippings -- the wall is something of a shrine, like in a teenager's room.

PETER (V.O.)
Wait! Yes! At long last! It's him!
America's hottest young star --
Cameron Drake!

Emily kisses her fingertips and touches the poster of Cameron; then she decides what-the-hell and kisses the poster on the lips.

EXT. OSCARS

Peter is now interviewing CAMERON DRAKE. Cameron is a typical LA/grunge-style star; he has a scraggly goatee, longish, unkempt hair, and wears a black leather jacket and a string tie. Beside him stands his current girlfriend, SONYA. Sonya is an English supermodel, tall, gorgeous and emaciated, wearing a tiny, very expensive lace mini-dress, and an ultra-cool, ultra-vacant facial expression.

PETER
So Cameron, tonight's the big night!

CAMERON
(mumbling)
Right...

PETER
Excuse me?

CAMERON
(mumbling louder, still
not quite audible)
I said, right...

PETER
Yes! Whatever! Everyone's saying
that you're the odds-on favorite to
win. How do you feel about that?
Speak up!

CAMERON
Well, basically, I think awards are
like, meaningless. I'm an artist.
All the nominees are artists. We
shouldn't be forced to compete
against each other, like dogs.

PETER
I hear you. So -- why are you here?

CAMERON
In case I win.

Cameron grins, and the crowd, and Emily, go wild.

INT. MEREDITH'S BASEMENT

Meredith and Jack are watching the Oscars in the basement of Meredith's family's home. Vicky and Mike are with them.

MEREDITH
(regarding Cameron)
He is just so cool!

Meredith and Vicky squeal.

MIKE
I don't think he's so great.

JACK
What's that stuff on his chin? It's
like a troll doll.

MEREDITH/VICKY
Shut up!

ANGLE on the TV set. Peter continues to interview Cameron and Sonya.

PETER
Now Sonya, you have been called the
supermodel of the world. How do you
feel about that?

SONYA
It's just a physical thing. I can't
help it.

PETER
You and Cameron have been seen
everywhere. Do I hear wedding bells?

SONYA
Cameron and I feel very deeply about
each other. Our souls have joined.
We have an understanding that goes
beyond a piece of paper. We fly
together, over the universe.

PETER
And how long have you known each
other?

CAMERON
(sincerely)
Three weeks.

Cameron pulls open his shirt, or pushes up his sleeve,
revealing a tattoo which reads "SONYA FOREVER."

MEREDITH
She is just so gross!

MIKE
I'd like to join her soul.

The guys make barking noises, while the girls hit them with
pillows.

EXT. HOWARD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Howard lives in a small, immaculately maintained house, very traditional.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM

Howard is seated in front of his TV. The room is neat and extremely clean. There are many framed family and school photos. A bowl of popcorn, a bottle of beer, the TV Guide and the remote control are all arranged precisely on a TV tray.

Howard holds a high school yearbook in his lap; he is paging through it.

MERYL STREEP (V.O.)

And the nominees for Best Actor are Paul Newman for "Coot," Clint Eastwood for "Codger," Michael Douglas for "Primary Urges," Steven Seagal for "Snowball In Hell," and finally, with his first nomination -- Cameron Drake!

We hear APPLAUSE, and Howard cheers. ANGLE on the yearbook -- he has found the right page. We see a picture of Cameron, as a student, from a few years back. He has a goofier hairstyle, and wears sunglasses.

ANGLE on the TV screen. We see MERYL STREEP at a podium. Behind her is a large projection screen.

MERYL STREEP

Cameron rocketed to stardom with courage and charisma, tackling the role of a brave gay soldier in the breakthrough "To Serve And Protect."

ANGLE on a large projection screen behind Meryl, on which we see clips from "To Serve And Protect."

CLIP #1: The porch of a Midwestern farmhouse. Cameron stands on the porch with a battered valise. He is dressed conservatively and has neatly trimmed hair. His FATHER, a WWII veteran, wears his old Army cap and jacket. His MOM wears a housedress and weeps quietly.

FATHER

Make us proud, son.

CAMERON

I'll try, sir.

MOM

(hugging him)

I love you.

CAMERON
(very stoic)
Yes, ma'am.

INT. BRACKETT TV ROOM

All of the Brackett relatives have been very moved by this clip. They touch their hearts, shake their heads and sigh or cluck.

BERNIECE
(especially moved)
"Yes, ma'am."

INT. OSCARS

ANGLE on Meryl, watching the clip. She is also very moved, and dabs at her eyes.

CLIP #2: Combat. Cameron carries DANNY, his wounded buddy, through a jungle, as bombs explode all around them.

CAMERON
You're gonna make it, Danny.

DANNY
I love ya, Billy.

CAMERON
Wait -- do you love me as a friend,
or -- in another way?

DANNY
Another way, Billy.

CAMERON
You mean -- as a brother?

DANNY
No. Another way.

CAMERON
You mean -- as a cousin?

DANNY
No. Another way.

CAMERON
You mean -- as a pen pal?

DANNY
(fed up)
My legs hurt!

Another bomb explodes nearby and Cameron resumes running.

INT. MEREDITH'S TV ROOM

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Mike and Jack are aiming imaginary machine guns at each other, firing away and making explosion noises. Meredith and Vicki are annoyed by their immature behavior.

MEREDITH

You guys! It's really sad!

CLIP #3: A military courtroom. ANGLE on the PROSECUTING ATTORNEY.

ATTORNEY

Lieutenant Stevens, you have been awarded two Purple Hearts and the Congressional Medal of Honor. You have saved the lives of your entire unit.

ANGLE on Cameron, in uniform, in the witness box.

ATTORNEY

However -- your sergeant has discovered the following items in your footlocker. Please tell the court if they are yours.

(he holds up a letter)
A personal letter, to another soldier.

The crowd GASPS.

CAMERON

Yes, sir.

ATTORNEY

(holding up a
Polaroid)

A photograph, signed "Danny. San Francisco."

CAMERON

Yes, sir.

The crowd BUZZES, and a woman SCREAMS.

ATTORNEY

(holding up a video
cassette)

An autographed copy...
(a dramatic pause)
... of "Beaches," with Bette Midler.

CAMERON

Give that back!

JUDGE
(banging his gavel, as
the courtroom erupts)
Discharged! Dishonorable!

Cameron's Father stands and leaves in disgust. His Mother stands, torn; she carries a homemade pie or cake.

INT. ROADHOUSE

The crowd is transfixed by this scene, especially Walter.

WALTER
Man. So he's like a soldier, and
he's gay. And they're kicking him
out. That's not fair. I mean, he
killed people.

CLIP #4: The Lincoln Memorial. Cameron, in civilian clothes, sits on the steps with Danny, his buddy. Danny now has no legs.

CAMERON
Did I do the right thing?

DANNY
(gesturing to Lincoln)
Ask him.

CLOSEUP on the huge statue of Abe Lincoln, as patriotic music swells.

CAMERON
(to the statue)
Well, Mr. Lincoln? Am I still a good American?

He waits for a reply.

DANNY
It's a statue, Billy.

CAMERON
I love you, Danny. Come on. Let's go home.

Cameron strides manfully down the steps, ignoring the fact that Danny cannot possibly follow him. ANGLE on Danny, struggling on the steps, very pissed off.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

Emily is clutching her teddy bear, terribly moved, her chin trembling. She holds out Teddy, and bends his legs so they vanish; then she kisses him.

INT. OSCARS

MERYL STREEP
And the winner is...
(she opens the envelope)
Cameron Drake!

The crowd at the Oscars goes wild. ANGLE on Cameron and Sonya, in the audience, both smoking. Cameron sits up, stunned. He stands, dazed. Sonya kisses him. As the APPLAUSE thunders, he begins to move toward the stage.

INT. BRACKETT TV ROOM

All of the Bracketts are going wild, hooting and hollering.

INT. ROADHOUSE

Led by Walter, the crowd is chanting "CAM-RON! CAM-RON!"

INT. MEREDITH'S TV ROOM

Meredith and Vicky are hugging each other and screaming. Jack and Mike are unimpressed, and chant "DOO-FUS! DOO-FUS!"

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

Emily makes her teddy bear kiss Cameron's poster. Pinned near the poster is a photo of Emily as she used to look, when she was overweight.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM

Howard is toasting the TV set with a glass of champagne.

HOWARD
Hear, hear!

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF GREENLEAF - NIGHT

We see the entire small town in the moonlight, as CHEERS and WHISTLES fill the air, as if it were New Year's Eve times one hundred. Perhaps small FIREWORKS are set off, and we also hear SIRENS, CHURCH BELLS and whatever else can be used to make noise.

INT. OSCARS

Cameron now stands behind the podium, holding his Oscar. He sweeps his hair back, and squints. He takes a deep breath.

CAMERON
Whoa. Man. Nice. Um, I'd like to
thank a great director, an incredible
cast...

INT. BRACKETT TV ROOM

EVERYONE
(in unison, joining
in with Cameron)
And my agent...

INT. OSCARS

CAMERON
But this was kind of more than just a movie. It's a great part and all, but this really belongs to all of the gay soldiers and sailors and other guys and women who defend this country, who keep us free, but -- can't date.

The crowd APPLAUDS, full of good liberal enthusiasm.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM

Howard shakes his head at Cameron's remarks.

INT. OSCARS

CAMERON
But you know, I'm just an actor, playing somebody. That's kind of easy. So maybe I should thank someone else, someone who's really been there. Someone who taught me a lot, about poetry and Shakespeare and staying awake. Someone who's just an overall great guy. And a great teacher. Which is what counts. And he's gay, so -- good for him! I've been thinking about this, and I'd like to dedicate this whole night to a great gay teacher. To Howard Brackett, from Greenleaf, Indiana. Hey, Mr. Brackett -- we won!

Cameron holds up the Oscar, as the crowd CHEERS.

INT. BRACKETT TV ROOM

The whole family is staring at the set, in complete silence, frozen by what's just happened. Aunt Becky and Uncle Roger exchange a look. Berniece rises, and takes a deep breath.

BERNIECE
More bridge mix?

INT. ROADHOUSE

The crowd is equally silent and stunned. Walter cannot process the information.

WALTER

Wait...

INT. MEREDITH'S TV ROOM

The four teenagers are staring at the set, completely spooked.

MEREDITH/VICKY/JACK/MIKE

(low and ominous)

Whoa...

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

Emily is completely frozen, her jaw dropped open.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM

ANGLE on Howard's face: he is absolutely stunned, and pale. His lips start to move slightly, soundlessly. Clutching the remote control, he sees Cameron holding his Oscar and waving to the CHEERING crowd, which gives him a standing ovation.

The screen GOES DARK. ANGLE on Howard, standing, quivering, holding the remote. He runs to the window, and throws the remote outside.

Howard, complete panic in his eyes, runs out of the room.

INT. HOWARD'S BEDROOM

There is a pile of clothes on the floor. The room seems to be deserted, then we see that a closet door is open. We hear frantic SOUNDS from inside the closet. First, a loud, fussy necktie flies out. This is followed by a pink shirt. We hear Howard GASP in horror.

ANGLE on a particularly loud patchwork madras sports jacket, hanging by itself in the closet. Howard grabs it.

INT. LIVING ROOM

ANGLE on the fireplace, as Howard piles up various items for a bonfire. All the clothing is already piled up. Howard adds a bottle of Aramis cologne. Next comes a pair of colorful espadrilles.

ANGLE on Howard, clutching something to his chest, very torn. He holds out the item -- it is a CD of "Sunset Boulevard." In agony, he pitches it into the fireplace.

The phone RINGS. Howard howls, and starts to move in five directions at once. Finally, he grabs a nearby phone.

HOWARD

(into phone)

Hello?

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

Emily is on the phone, shaken and frightened.

EMILY
(into phone)
Howard?

INT. LIVING ROOM

HOWARD
(into phone)
It's not true!

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

EMILY
(into phone)
Howard...

INT. LIVING ROOM

HOWARD
(into phone)
Sweetheart, darling -- you know I
love you, don't you? And you know
we're going to have a wonderful life
together, here in Greenleaf, a
wonderful, perfect life! With kids,
and magazine subscriptions, and, and
barbecues! We're going to barbecue
everything! And we're getting
married! In three days!

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

EMILY
(into phone)
Howard...

INT. LIVING ROOM

HOWARD
(into phone)
Yes?

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

EMILY
(into phone)
But... but why? Why would Cameron
say that?

INT. LIVING ROOM

HOWARD

(into phone)

I don't know. He's been out in Hollywood, maybe he's part of a cult, maybe it's drugs, did you see his pupils? Huge! I don't know why he said it! But it's not true! It's ridiculous!

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

EMILY

(into phone)

I believe you...
(convincing herself)
They were big...

INT. LIVING ROOM

HOWARD

(into phone)

We'll get to the bottom of this! It was probably just -- a mistake! Slip of the tongue! He didn't say a gay teacher, he said... he said a grey teacher, a great teacher, a fey teacher -- no! It's a mistake, by tomorrow, who'll even remember? I'm just a high school teacher, in a small town, with a fiancée. A wonderful fiancée. A thin fiancée. By tomorrow, Sunday at the latest, Monday outside, we'll be laughing about this! Laughing! Right?

He laughs, a bit too hysterically.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

EMILY

(forcing herself to
be upbeat, in a
tiny, strangled voice)

Ha-ha...

INT. LIVING ROOM

HOWARD

(into phone)

That's my girl! Isn't this funny?
Something to tell our grandchildren?
Let's name them! Right now! Bob!
And Brad! And Butch!

The doorbell RINGS. Howard hangs up. He goes to the front door. He takes a deep breath, pulling himself together. He opens the door. Frank and Berniece stand outside.

HOWARD
(trying to be
nonchalant)
Mom. Dad.

EXT. HOWARD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Howard steps outside and faces his parents.

FRANK
Howard.

BERNIECE
Is there something you'd like to tell
us?

HOWARD
(still feigning
nonchalance)
Um... something about the wedding,
the music, I've made some
decisions...

FRANK
Howard.

HOWARD
I am not gay!

BERNIECE
Of course not!

FRANK
My son's not gay!

BERNIECE
But that boy, on the television...

HOWARD
I don't know what that was all about!
I am outraged! I may hire an
attorney! I may sue!

FRANK
Cochrane. Johnny Cochrane. Not that
woman.

HOWARD
Emily thinks that Cameron's on
drugs...

FRANK
That was my thought. Reefer.

BERNIECE
Boys. Calm down. It was a mistake.
I'm sure he meant well.
(MORE)

BERNIECE (CONT'D)

And Howard, we want you to know --
you're our son and we will always
love you. Gay, straight, red,
green... if you rob a bank, if you
kill someone...

FRANK

If you wipe out a busload of
schoolchildren with a machete...

BERNIECE

(very direct and forceful)

As long as you get married. I need
that wedding. I need my roses. I
need some beauty and some music and
some placecards before I die. It's
like heroin. Do you hear me, Howard?

FRANK

(to Howard, regarding
Berniece)

She's an old woman. Don't mess.

HOWARD

Everything's going to be fine. I'm
Howard. I'm your son.

FRANK

(very vindictive)

But that Cameron Drake...

BERNIECE

Maybe he meant Walter...

(to Howard, very perky)

G'night!

INT. HOWARD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

All the curtains are drawn. Howard lies in bed, in his pajamas, the covers pulled up to his chin. The phone beside the bed is unplugged. Howard is wide awake, staring at the ceiling. He reaches out, and pulls the covers over his head.

EXT. GREENLEAF - DAWN

We see the SUNRISE over the town, and the birds start to CHIRP.

INT. HOWARD'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Howard is in bed; he opens his eyes. He looks around: the day is sunny and quiet. He takes a deep breath -- everything is going to be fine.

INT. KITCHEN

Howard, now dressed, stands at the counter, sipping a cup of coffee. The room is filled with sunlight.

Tentatively, with great trepidation, he turns on the RADIO. He hears only the light, soothing MUSIC. Growing bolder, he turns to another station.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

And in Manila, a volcano has erupted, destroying countless homes and killing thousands...

HOWARD

(relieved)

Ahh...

Howard smiles, relieved that the news is not about him. He switches OFF the radio. Everything is fine, just fine.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY

Howard has on his windbreaker, and carries his briefcase. He checks his bowtie in the hall mirror -- he is still the same person. All is well. He opens the front door.

EXT. HOWARD'S HOUSE - DAY

As Howard steps out of his house, all hell breaks loose. He is immediately bombarded by NOISE and blinded by a blizzard of FLASHBULBS. As the glare subsides, we see that the entire yard and the block beyond are packed with people: crowds of local onlookers, but especially press, from all over the world. There are many film crews, each led by a correspondent with a microphone. There are cars, vans and trucks backed up throughout the area. A helicopter hovers overhead.

As Howard struggles to make his way to his car, he is engulfed in a sea of REPORTERS, most of them thrusting microphones at him. Amid the babble, we hear such remarks and questions as "You're out!" "Did you know this was going to happen?" "Can we get a statement?" "Have you talked to Cameron?" "Should gays be allowed to teach?" "Are you a figurehead?" "Are you a spokesperson?" "Are you a Satanist?" "Do you have a boyfriend?" "Is he cute?" "Were you in the military?" "Was Cameron a good student?" "Was he a good lover?" And a lot of "Over here! Over here!"

As Howard tries to get to his car, he vainly tries to answer questions or ignore them; he is bewildered, outraged and frightened. He keeps saying "What?" "I don't know" and "No! No! No!"

As Howard approaches his car, he encounters Peter Malloy, the TV correspondent from the Oscars. Peter wears flashy designer clothes and a telegenic tan. He has a cameraman and a microphone; he speaks to the camera.

PETER

This is Peter Malloy for "Inside Entertainment." In Versace.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
And coming right this way is Howard
Brackett, and all I can say is "O.J.
Who?" Howard! Over here!

HOWARD
(to the crowd)
What do you people want from me?

PETER
Howard, could we have a few words?

HOWARD
(at wit's end)
Get off my property! You're ruining
the lawn!

PETER
(putting his hand over
the mike)
Nice tie.

Peter and Howard's eyes meet. Peter smiles.

HOWARD
What?

PETER
You look great.

HOWARD
(unnerved)
Thank you.

CROWD
Howard! Howard!

HOWARD
(moving away from
Peter)
I am getting married! I am not gay!

Howard lunges into his car, which is immediately surrounded by
reporters. Peter turns to the camera.

PETER
You heard it here. He's getting
married. He's not gay.

Peter uses his forefinger to make his nose grow six inches, for
a Pinnochio effect.

INT. CLASSROOM - A HALF-HOUR LATER

Howard's senior English class. Howard has not arrived yet; the
room is BUZZING with chatter.

The door opens and Howard enters, his hair askew, very flustered. There are more REPORTERS outside, asking questions and thrusting microphones. Among them are VALERIE HIKER, a glossy blonde with obvious network ambitions and CHAD FARRELL, a slightly petrified Dan Rather wannabe.

VALERIE

(sticking her head in)
Should gays be allowed to handle
fresh produce? Your answer?

She shoves the microphone at Howard.

HOWARD

I don't care! This is a classroom!
(he shuts the door
forcefully and turns
to his students)
Class.

The room is suddenly and completely silent. Howard shakes himself violently, and then walks to his desk, intent on a normal day.

HOWARD

Where were we? Romantic poetry.
Yes. Alright. Shakespeare.
Talented. English. Dead.
(he opens a book and
begins to recite)
"Shall I compare thee to a summer's
day?"
(someone giggles, and
Howard looks up)
Yes?

ANGLE on the class; everyone looks down at their desks.

HOWARD

"Thou are more lovely and more
temperate. Rough winds do shake the
darling buds of May."

A paper airplane scars across Howard's desk. He grabs it, and opens the paper. Scrawled in Bic pen are the words "MR. BRACKETTE -- BEST ACTRESS." Howard slams his book down on the desk.

HOWARD

Alright! Let's get it over with!
Out in the open! What do you want to
know?

MEREDITH

(her voice quavering)
Is it... true?

HOWARD

Is what true?

MEREDITH

What he said, on the Oscars. Cameron Drake. Are you... are you... are you...

VICKY

Gay.

MEREDITH

I can say it!
(a beat)

Are you?

HOWARD

Of course not! Don't be ridiculous!

Everyone in the class relaxes and starts chattering, relieved.

MIKE

I knew it! I knew it! I told you!

HOWARD

(trying to restore order)
Class! People! What is all this
hubbub?

JACK

But -- why did he say it? On TV? In
front of everybody in the whole
world?

VICKY

I mean, are you like, incredibly
embarrassed? Did you just want to
put a grenade in your mouth?

JACK

Why should he be embarrassed? If
it's not true?

HOWARD

Everyone! Students! Please! I
don't know why he said it. I've been
trying to figure it out myself. But
that isn't our job here.

MIKE

(waving his hand)
Mr. Brackett! Mr. Brackett!

HOWARD

Mike?

MIKE

I've been thinking about it, all
night, why would that guy say you
were gay? And I figured it out. I
got it.

HOWARD

What?

MIKE

Look at you!

HOWARD

Excuse me?

MIKE

No offense, but you're an English teacher.

VICKY

Exactly!

MIKE

I mean, all this poetry and odes and bonnets.

HOWARD

Sonnets.

MIKE

And you're kinda prissy.

HOWARD

Prissy?

MIKE

Not like in a bad way. I mean you're like -- smart.

JACK

And well-dressed.

MEREDITH

And really clean.

MIKE

It doesn't look good. And on top of that, you got the drama club and sometimes you ride that bicycle and you've been engaged for three years. Think about it.

HOWARD

What does...

MIKE

You add it up, of course the guy thinks you're gay. It's like, a natural mistake. I mean, can you blame him? Plus, he was in that movie, so his brain is goin' that way, then he remembers you and he goes -- smart, clean, totally decent human being -- gay!

VICKY

And remember, that one day last term,
when you came in wearing that little
scarf thing...

HOWARD

An ascot! It was an experiment!

MIKE

Gay.

Chad Farrell opens the door and shoves his head in. FLASHBULBS erupt.

CHAD

Howard! Gays in the space program?
Sharing a pod? Any comment?

TOM HALLIWELL, the school principal, shoves his way past the reporters. Halliwell is affable and gregarious, a glad-handing Jaycees kind of guy.

HALLIWELL

(to the reporters)
Excuse me! He's teaching!
(he shoves the door
closed on the clamor)

Howard!

HOWARD

Mr. Halliwell?

HALLIWELL

Howard, what's goin' on out there?
All those reporters, and TV cameras.
It's a nuthouse.

MIKE

See? They want pictures. Of the gay
guy.

VICKY

'Cause it's weird. Like a serial
killer.

MEREDITH

Or a panda.

HALLIWELL

They won't listen to me, I'm just the
principal. Howard, I hate to ask,
but could you, maybe just talk to
'em? Set things straight?

MIKE

Punch 'em out.

HOWARD

But... but... I'm teaching...

HALLIWELL
I'll take the class.

HOWARD
(to the class)
I'll be right back. Page 58. Keep
reading.

MIKE
Mr. Brackett?

HOWARD
Yes?

MIKE
(trying to help)
Watch the hands.

Howard, steaming, squares his shoulders and opens the door.
The REPORTERS immediately start shouting questions.

ALL THE STUDENTS
(encouragingly)
Yo!

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE - SAME TIME

A cozy, battered room which the faculty retreats to, to relax and smoke. A group of teachers are gossiping furiously about Howard. They include ED and AVA KENROW. Ed is an Algebra teacher; he is tall and rigid, and eaten up with jealousy. He thinks of himself as assured and suave, but everyone sees right through him. Ava, his wife, is the school librarian, who wears pseudo-Chanel suits and has her hair up in a French twist; she subscribes to Vanity Fair and thinks of herself as the most sophisticated person in Greenleaf. Also present are MRS. BAXTER, a jolly, sane History teacher, MICKEY CORLEY, the fresh-scrubbed girls gym teacher, and TRINA PAXTON, a fairly devil-may-care Art teacher, an ex-hippie, ex-alcoholic who's moved back to her hometown to pull herself together; Trina is Emily's best friend. CARL MICKLEY sits in a corner, grading papers; Carl is an extremely hard-working Biology teacher, a mouse-like father of eight.

TRINA
I always knew. Oh, come on..

CARL
Knew what?

MRS. BAXTER
Oh, Carl. I remember that Drake kid
-- sweet. Slow.

AVA
Well, I say bravo. It's a blow for
freedom. And so does Ed.

ED
Good for Howard. To quote John
Lennon -- the late John Lennon -- let
it be, let it be.

CARL
Knew what?

ED
(beginning to sing)
When I find myself in times of trouble,
Mother Mary comes to me...

TRINA
Please. Don't.

AVA
Trina!

ED
(singing)
Speaking words of wisdom...

TRINA
Shut up, Ed! We're talking about
Howard!

AVA
Trina!

CARL
Why are we talking about Howard?

TRINA
'Cause he likes dick, Carl!

Emily enters the room. Everyone freezes for a split-second,
then changes the subject.

MRS. BAXTER
Is that Xerox still on the fritz?

TRINA
Just needs paper!

EMILY
(with false cheer)
Good morning, everyone!

ED
(to Emily, on his
way out)
That's the spirit!

AVA
(following Ed,
patting Emily)
Call me.

CARL

Dick who?

INT. LIBRARY

A small, standard school library. Ava and Ed enter; Ava quickly locks the door behind them. They are immediately in each other's arms, hurled against the book return counter, kissing passionately.

AVA

He's gay!

ED

He's gay!

AVA

There's nothing wrong with it...

ED

It's perfectly natural...

AVA

What a progressive statement -- a gay son. A gay husband. A gay Teacher of the Year...

AVA/ED

(with wild glee)
I don't think so!

They break apart and start circling the library, aglow with ambition.

ED

Year after year...

AVA

It's always someone else...

ED

Some years I wasn't even nominated...

AVA

It's politics, it's all politics...

ED

So I never win. I never get anything. No awards. No honors. No recognition. Just because the kids hate me.

AVA

Because you teach something necessary...

ED

Something real. And I will be acknowledged. I will be acclaimed. And Howard Brackett will be fired. Because he's gay. And I teach...

AVA

Say it. Say it now. Say it slow.

ED

Algebra.

AVA

(on fire)
And I like it.

They kiss again, passionately.

EXT. BRACKETT HOME - NIGHT

Howard's parents' home. It is now decorated with twinkle lights and big white hearts with "Howard and Emily" written on them. There are also swags of white tulle, party-store wedding bells and other wedding-themed decorations. Howard stands on the lawn, looking up at all this.

INT. BRACKETT TV ROOM

The room has been decorated for Howard's bachelor party. There are Playboy centerfolds on the walls, and large sports insignia. There is a keg of beer, and trays of sandwiches and junk food, real guy stuff.

Gathered for the bachelor party are Frank, Walter, Carl Mickley and an assortment of other male friends and relatives, about 12 in all. They are starting on the keg and arguing over sports, as Howard enters. Everyone cheers and razzes or pummels Howard.

HOWARD

(very raucous and gung-ho)

He's here!

WALTER

My man!

FRANK

Numero uno!

HOWARD

So guys -- are we gonna have a bachelor party?

UNCLE ROGER

You bet!

HOWARD

Are we gonna tie one on?

COUSIN LENNIE
Fuckin' A!

HOWARD
Are we gonna get down and dirty?

Everyone cheers or makes disgusting noises.

HOWARD
Just us dirty dudes!

FRANK
I wish that Cameron Drake could see this!

All the guys go "Whoa, Jack!" and "You said it!"

FRANK
That little beatnik!

WALTER
We've been working on this for weeks, man. We got all your favorite stuff. Everything you go for.

HOWARD
Hit me!

WALTER
We got -- the cuisine of provincial France.

Uncle Roger removes the silver lid from a chafing dish, to reveal a delicacy.

UNCLE ROGER
Your favorite. Supremes de Faison au Foie Gras.

HOWARD
What?

WALTER
And we got tunes. Smokin' stuff. From New York City.

COUSIN ERNIE
(by the CD player,
holding up
possibilities)
Name your poison. "Spider Woman"?
"Showboat"? "Phantom"?

HOWARD
Wait a minute. Guys. Studs. This is supposed to be a bachelor party. I wanna get raw. Raunchy. Wrecked. I want cheap wine. Cheap women. Budget women. Porn.

FRANK

Howard?

WALTER

But -- this is the stuff you told me to get. Last week. But hey -- I got something even hotter! I had to send away for it. On the tube.

Cousin Lennie and Carl are turning on the TV and the VCR.

HOWARD

Now you're talking! What've you got? Traci Lords? "Little Oral Annie"?

WALTER

Better! Just what you've been asking for. Uncut.

FRANK

The laser disc.

HOWARD

What?

WALTER

(holding up a deluxe laser disc)

"Funny Girl"!

HOWARD

Walter! Dad! I can't believe you. I don't want to watch "Funny Girl", at my bachelor party!

WALTER

(lost)

You don't? But -- you always talk about, you know, Barbra.

FRANK

(reprimanding Howard)

Your brother sent away.

COUSIN ERNIE

You had that little film festival last year, you made us all watch. All her movies. It was fun.

HOWARD

I don't care! I'm sorry, I am truly offended. I don't know who, or what you think I am. But -- I'm a man. I'm masculine. And I do not want to fucking watch "Funny Girl"!

COUSIN LENNIE

Me neither. I hate that crap!

HOWARD
Fuckin' A!

COUSIN LENNIE
Dontcha got "Star Is Born"?

FRANK
She looks bad in "Star Is Born".

COUSIN ERNIE
That Afro.

ANGLE on Howard, listening to this conversation, dumbfounded.
He heads for the door.

WALTER
"Yentl". "Yentl" all the way.
Howard was right. She shoulda won.
Or at least been nominated. Actress
and director.

COUSIN ERNIE
(squaring off)
"Yentl" sucks.

HOWARD
(at the door, turning,
suddenly a very
dangerous man)
What did you say?

COUSIN ERNIE
It sucks. It's boring.

HOWARD
(after a beat)
Say it again.

COUSIN ERNIE
(mimicking Streisand)
"Papa, can you hear me..."

Howard lunges at Ernie, and they begin pounding each other.
Everyone starts swearing, yelling and brawling.

FRANK
(cheering Howard on)
That's my boy!

INT. EMILY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emily is curled up on her bed; Trina sits in a nearby chair.
They are sharing low-fat snacks; Trina holds a magazine.

EMILY
You're being ridiculous.

TRINA

I know, I know. But I'm your friend. Let's just take the quiz. How can it hurt?

EMILY

Trina...

TRINA

The Cosmo Quiz. "Is Your Boyfriend Gay?" Question Number One.

(she reads from the magazine)

"When you're out on a date, does your boyfriend act A) Bored and distracted. B) Bossy and immature. C) Involved and romantic."

EMILY

(proudly)

C.

TRINA

(consulting the answer key)

Uh-oh.

EMILY

What?

TRINA

Danger sign. Okay, Question Number Two. "Was your boyfriend's last relationship with: A) A fashion model. B) A beautiful nurse. C) Someone named Chris."

EMILY

None of the above! You see? Howard's last girlfriend was a woman at college who no one ever got to meet because she broke his heart and he doesn't want to talk about it. He's straight, Trina, I know him. I love him. And he loves me, he even loved me when I was heavy, when no one would look at me!

TRINA

That's what I'm worried about. I love Howard, but you can't marry him just because you think he's your only shot. There are lots of guys out there!

EMILY

(holding up the old
picture of herself)

Look at me! This is a very small
town! I'm lucky that I even met
Howard!

TRINA

Okay, okay, I know, Howard is perfect
-- just one more question. One last
one. "When you and your boyfriend
have sex, is he A) Heat-seeking. B)
Inept. C) Businesslike."

EMILY

That is such a stupid question.

TRINA

Well? Which is it? Come on, I tell
you everything, I told you about all
my husbands, I gave you inches and
play-by-plays, come on, play fair.
What's Howard like in bed?

EMILY

He's... he's...

TRINA

(the light dawning)
Emily.

EMILY

I've told you. He's very romantic.

TRINA

Emily.

EMILY

He respects me. I think it's
beautiful.

TRINA

Nothing? Never? Nada?

EMILY

(sweetly)

We're waiting. For our wedding
night. Is that so weird? That two
human beings might want to save
themselves, that they might want to
share something very precious, at
just the right moment? Is that so
bizarre?

TRINA

(after a beat)

Well... yeah.

EMILY

Trina! Do you know what I do when I feel, you know, urges?

TRINA

What?

EMILY

I just put on one of my Richard Simmons tapes, and I work out for hours, it's great.

TRINA

How many tapes do you have?

EMILY

Oh... fifty?

ANGLE on a shelf filled with workout tapes. Emily takes one down.

EMILY

(holding up the tape)

"Disco Classics."

(confidentially)

It's so hot.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

A fairly prosperous brick home, landscaped and set back from the road. A group of cars are parked out front. Lights shine from within.

HALLIWELL (V.O.)

As this meeting is unofficial, I think we can dispense with minutes. It's just us.

INT. SUBURBAN LIVING ROOM

A quickly-called meeting of the local school board is in progress. Tom Halliwell, the high school principal, leads the meeting. We are in his home; the nine MEMBERS of the board, men and women, are seated on couches, wing-chairs and folding chairs. Ava and Ed Kenrow are also present.

HALLIWELL

Maybe I'm blowing this whole thing out of proportion. I hope I am. But you know -- this coming Monday is high school graduation. And we're going to be announcing our annual Teacher of the Year. Who will then become eligible for national competition. Representing, well -- us. Now this year's nominees are Howard Brackett and -- Ed Kenrow. Ed?

ED

Howard Brackett is a very fine teacher, make no mistake. It isn't a question of Howard's abilities, it's a matter of -- lifestyle. Alternative lifestyle.

45

HALLIWELL

New York lifestyle. If you catch my drift.

BOARD MEMBER #1

But -- Howard's getting married, isn't he? Before graduation. I mean, he's not...

BOARD MEMBER #2

A New Yorker. Is he?

BOARD MEMBER #3

Something really needs to be done.

ED

Please, please, let's not do anything drastic. Just yet. Now, as a nominee, I really shouldn't be speaking about Howard. Or his -- desires. So I'll surrender the floor to -- my wife, Ava.

AVA

(rising)

We're a small town. Is Howard gay or straight, that's his business. And poor Emily's, of course. But today, I came across these books, in our public school stacks. Someone -- I don't know who -- had placed them there, where students, our young people, can read them. Should we be concerned? Judge for yourselves.

(she holds up a book)

Heather Has Two Mommies. The story of two lesbians, raising a child.

ANGLE on various Board Members, shaking their heads.

AVA

(holding up more books)

Daddy's Roommate. Someone called Bob. And this -- Uncle Peter Has A Beautiful Apartment.

ANGLE on more Board Members, visibly upset.

AVA

(holding up a final book)

Aunt Sarah's Large Friend.

There is an ANGRY BUZZ in the room, as Ava nods her head sadly.

EXT. GREENLEAF DINER - MIDNIGHT

The local hangout, open late. A traditional chrome-and-formica joint, brightly lit. Howard's car is parked out front.

INT. DINER

Howard sits in a corner booth, alone; the diner is almost deserted. He is trying to eat, without much success. He has a bandage on his forehead. He is clearly upset.

Peter Malloy approaches him.

PETER
Howard? Mr. Brackett?

HOWARD
No, no more interviews. Get away from me. I don't have anything to say, I have no comments, I have no thoughts on anything, I didn't see "Wong Foo" and I am trying to have my dinner!

PETER
At midnight?
(noticing the bandage)
What happened?

HOWARD
You happened! You and all your horrible little friends! Everywhere I go, all day long, at my house, at school, you've all been hounding me! Have some decency! Just keep the hell away!

Howard picks up his plate and strides past Peter. He moves to the far end of the counter, and tries to resume eating. Peter follows him.

PETER
I understand, I do. It's an onslaught.

HOWARD
It's an invasion! It's inhuman! You people should be ashamed!
(to the WAITRESS)
Check!

PETER
I am. Of my colleagues. They have no right to pry into your life. They're sleazy.

HOWARD
They're vultures!

PETER
They're vermin!

HOWARD
They're pigs!

WAITRESS
(not nasty, just confused)
So Howard -- are you gay?

PETER
(to the Waitress, in
agreement)
Honey.

HOWARD
No!

Howard throws some money on the counter and bolts out of the diner.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Howard runs out of the diner; Peter follows him..

PETER
Howard! You were just outed on the Academy Awards, on worldwide television, by Cameron Drake! People are curious!

HOWARD
I don't care. I didn't ask for this.
I don't deserve this. I'm a private citizen. A high school teacher.

Peter falls to his knees in the parking lot.

PETER
Howard, you have to help me!

HOWARD
What?

PETER
My show is dead last in the ratings.
Behind "Central Park West." Behind Carnie.
Behind one of those Fox shows with orphans.
No one will talk to me!

HOWARD
That's not my problem!

Howard strides toward his car.

PETER
Howard, I'm gay.

Howard turns.

HOWARD
What?

PETER
I'm gay. I came out.

HOWARD
To whom?

PETER
To everyone. My family. My boss. My dog. So I know what you're going through. I was terrified.

HOWARD
What happened?

PETER
I said Mom, Dad, Sparky -- I'm gay.

HOWARD
Oh my God.

PETER
And my Mom said, we know. And I said, how, and she said, sweetheart, we've met you. Now we're closer than ever. Howard, sometimes the worst thing you think can happen turns out to be the best thing.

HOWARD
For you! Good night!

Peter lies down in front of Howard's car.

PETER
You don't understand!

HOWARD
Get up!

PETER
Everyone gets stories, Mary Hart, Diane Sawyer, the morning shows -- not me. They dismiss me. They call me a lightweight. A sports coat and smile. As if that were a bad thing. Howard, I need dirt!

HOWARD
I will run you over, I swear I will, it's justifiable homicide...

PETER

(up on his knees)

Howard -- picture it. If you were gay. For the sake of argument. Prime time. My exclusive. Me in -- Calvin Klein. Three button. You in -- you. One on one.

HOWARD

Who cares?

PETER

Everyone. You're a great story. You inspired Cameron Drake. You're smart. You're handsome.

HOWARD

I am not.

PETER

I beg your pardon.

HOWARD

I am not handsome.

PETER

Okay -- attractive. Manly.

HOWARD

(liking it)

Oh, please.

PETER

Sears, with a sparkle. No, I'm sorry. You're not attractive. No way.

HOWARD

What?

PETER

You're hot. Que hombre.

HOWARD

Are you... are you -- hitting on me?

PETER

(flirting)

Of course not. You're straight.

(stroking the hood of Howard's car)

Nice car...

HOWARD

Get your hands off it!

PETER

But if you came out...

HOWARD

What?

PETER

Things would change. You'd be happy.
Oh no!

HOWARD

I'd be fired -- oh yes!

PETER

So? You could get out of this dump!

HOWARD

(getting into his car)
I like this dump! It's not a dump!

PETER

(at the car window)
Howard -- I need you. I want you.
Be my Emmy.

HOWARD

No! I am getting married! I am not
gay!

PETER

You could be a hero. A role model.
A book deal. A doll!

HOWARD

You are disgusting! All you are
about is sex and show business and
which designer you're wearing!

PETER

Your point?

HOWARD

You are insane!

PETER

Over you. "Howard Brackett -- In And
Out."

Outraged, Howard speeds off. As he leaves, a van from another
TV station pulls up. Valerie Hiker leans out the window.

VALERIE

Was that Howard Brackett?

PETER

Not yet.

EXT. HILLTOP - MORNING

It is a bright, glorious morning. Peter stands with his
cameraman on a hill which has a view of the entire town. He
begins his report.

PETER

So Howard Brackett is a celebrity -- and how is Greenleaf coping? Look around -- sunshine. Clean air. Birds. Me.

(to the CAMERAMAN)

Cut! How's my hair? It feels off. Is it flat? Is it Tesh?

Peter takes out a mirror and starts inspecting his hair. Behind him, with a roar, Howard's house EXPLODES, with flames and debris shooting into the air. This does not yet register on Peter.

CAMERAMAN

Jesus Christ!

PETER

(still absorbed in his hair)

What?

EXT. HOWARD'S HOUSE - DAY

A huge hole has been blasted in Howard's roof and smoke pours out, but the house has been damaged, not destroyed. The yard is littered with debris. We hear fire engine SIRENS, coming closer.

Various news crews, all in their pajamas or robes, are already on the scene, setting up their shots. Valerie Hiker and Chad Farrell are among the voracious newshounds.

VALERIE

(into the camera)

I'm Valerie Hiker, KNBC Greenleaf. As you can see, Howard Brackett's home has been the target of terrorist activity...

CHAD

Chad Farrell reporting from Greenleaf, strike that, downtown Beirut...

PETER

(angling in front of the other reporters)

Flight 459. Oklahoma City. Howard Brackett. This is Peter Malloy, with an Inside Entertainment Exclusive Special Report...

VALERIE

(shoving herself in front of Peter)

Excuse me!

CHAD
(pushing his way in)
This is my story!

PETER
(very condescending)
Excuse me -- I'm gay.

As the Reporters battle for position, a group of KIDS ON BICYCLES pull up behind them, grinning and waving at the cameras.

Howard staggers out of his house, in pajamas. He is shaken but not injured. Peter and the other reporters descend on him.

PETER
Howard, are you injured?

VALERIE
Howard, who did this?

PETER
(indicating Valerie)
Was it her?

CHAD
Behold the ravaged figure of destiny's victim...

VALERIE
Target of terror...

PETER
John of Arc...

HOWARD
What... what's going on? What happened to my house?

The fire trucks ROAR onto the scene, and the firemen begin spraying water on the house.

Many cars have begun pulling up, and various townspeople emerge, all in nightgowns and pajamas. The scene is chaotic but oddly reminiscent of a neighborhood slumber party.

Howard's parents run from their pickup truck.

FRANK
Son, are you alright? Are you hurt?

HOWARD
(feeling himself)
No, I don't think so...

BERNIECE
What about your tuxedo?

Emily runs to Howard, in her nightgown and slippers. She hugs him.

EMILY
Howard, are you okay? I can't believe this is happening!

VALERIE
The brave fiancée, rushing to Howard's side -- any comments?

EMILY
What?

CHAD
Will this affect your wedding plans?

EMILY
No, of course not...

PETER
Are you a lesbian?

HOWARD
No!

PETER
I was asking her.

ANGLE on Meredith, Jack, Vicky and Mike, all in combinations of sleepwear, jeans and t-shirts. They stand in the street, watching the house and the firefighters.

MEREDITH
Oh my God, oh my God...

VICKY
Jesus, who did this?

MIKE
Was it like -- a bolt of lightning?

MEREDITH/VICKY
Mike!

JACK
(gesturing to the firefighters)
Come on, let's give 'em a hand...

ANGLE on Walter, in the yard being interviewed on camera by Peter.

WALTER
No, I wasn't actually in the house, but I've been there many times. Aside from Howard, I am probably the foremost authority on the interior... There's a couch...

PETER
(into the camera)
Our exclusive...

ANGLE on Howard, surrounded by his family and reporters.

BERNIECE
(grabbing the microphone)
Everything is fine! The tuxedo and
the ring are unharmed! The wedding
is on!

INT. CLASSROOM - A FEW HOURS LATER

We are in Howard's senior English class. Howard stands at the front of the room, with the title "Romantic Poetry" written on the blackboard.

MEREDITH
But I don't care about poetry!
Someone tried to blow you up!

HOWARD
They didn't blow me up. The house
can be repaired. It might have
been... a gas main. I'm sure there's
an explanation.

JACK
Exactly!

MIKE
It's that gay thing, I'm tellin' ya!
They think you're gay! You gotta do
something. Tell that Cameron guy,
tell everybody!

MEREDITH
Why would anybody want to be gay, if
they're going to blow you up?

HOWARD
(exasperated)
People don't want to be gay. They
don't fill out a form. And lots of
decent people are gay.

MIKE
Name one.

HOWARD
Walt Whitman.

MEREDITH
Really?

HOWARD
Yes. I... read that.

MIKE
Duh. He's a poet. Like, shock me.

JACK
But he didn't look gay. He looked like ZZ Top.

HOWARD
Michelangelo.

MIKE
Dead. Doesn't count.

ANOTHER STUDENT
Elton John.

MIKE
English. Doesn't count.

HOWARD
What about Socrates? Nureyev? Oscar Wilde?

MIKE
Don't know 'em. Doesn't count.

VICKY
Michael Jackson.

JACK
But he got married. To Elvis's daughter. Like Mr. Brackett.

HOWARD
What?

MEREDITH
But then they got divorced.

MIKE
Michael Jackson's not gay. He's beyond gay. It's like, you got straight, gay and Michael.

ANOTHER STUDENT
And LaToya.

VICKY
He's gay. He likes little boys.

HOWARD
They never proved that. And being gay doesn't mean you like little boys. Why do people think that? Being gay just means -- you're gay. You like -- guys.

MIKE
What about, like, lesbians?

HOWARD
Or girls. Maybe we should try to...
understand these people. Instead of
just gossiping about them.

VICKY
Do we have lesbians here? In
Indiana?

ANOTHER STUDENT
Is this an assignment? Like, find
some?

MIKE
I get the lezzie thing. I'm there.
It was in Penthouse. Two babes,
French schoolgirls, discovering their
innocent young bodies. Their ripe
buds of love.

MEREDITH
That's disgusting!

MIKE
It was hot!

VICKY
But two guys?

MIKE
Puke! Power puke! Attack of the
turd burglars!

HOWARD
What about eleven guys, going at it
with eleven other guys?

MIKE
That's disgusting!

HOWARD
That's football.

The whole class looks at Mike and goes, "Oooh!!!"

EXT. VFW HALL - AFTERNOON

A large local hall, often rented out for large receptions.
Howard's car pulls into the parking area, and Howard steps out.
He takes a deep breath, and squares his shoulders. He heads
inside.

INT. VFW HALL

This is the large, open room where the wedding reception is to take place. Berniece has an entire crew of female relatives busily decorating the place; the hall is in the process of becoming a wildly overdone wedding extravaganza. Women stand on ladders, hanging clusters of white balloons and miles of white crepe paper. There are also hundreds of strands of white twinkle lights, which Walter is testing. The many round tables are being draped with layers of white chiffon, and centerpieces are being assembled. Berniece, with her clipboard and a whistle, and Frank are supervising.

Howard enters the hall. He looks around, stunned at the beehive of excess.

HOWARD
Oh my God. Oh my God...

BERNIECE
Howard! Dear, I know it's your lunch hour, but I just wanted you to see this. It's really starting to take shape. My theme is "White Roses -- A Wonderful Wedding Wonderland In The Clouds."

(yelling at a woman
on a ladder)
Ellen! Anchor your doves!

HOWARD
(looking around)
I didn't realize there was going to be... so much...

BERNIECE
And we're just getting started!
(she blows her whistle)
Becky! That cluster needs more balloons! It looks anemic!

WALTER
(on a high ladder)
Dad, is it plugged in?

FRANK
Not yet. Your mother says we need double strands.

BERNIECE
Triple! And Susan -- blouse and gather. Those overskirts should reach the floor and puddle.

FRANK
(to Howard)
Don't look at me.

HOWARD

(keeping his voice down)

Gee, before you... well, could I
maybe talk to you for a minute?

BERNIECE

Of course, dear.

(yelling at a woman
hanging crepe paper)

Twist and turn, Barbara! Make magic!

HOWARD

(keeping his voice down)

I was just wondering, I mean, what
if, I mean just hypothetically, what
if, I don't know, something...
happened, if there was, say, a
tornado, or a hurricane, and they
needed the hall for... troops, or the
Red Cross, and we couldn't have the
wedding, would you be completely --
crushed?

There is a sudden silence in the hall. All of the workers are
looking at Howard, clearly eavesdropping.

WALTER

Like, by a house?

BERNIECE

Oh Howard, you are precious.

(to the workers)

Isn't he? You're just nervous, why,
before I married your father I almost
called off the whole thing, three
times.

FRANK

It's true.

AUNT BECKY

I remember!

HOWARD

But, would you be... disappointed?
In me?

BERNIECE

Sweetheart, there isn't going to be
any hurricane. There's going to be
sunshine and centerpieces and a
flower girl and all of the joyous
wonder of the most spectacular
wedding this town has ever seen.

HOWARD

But... this is very hard... I wish everyone wasn't... well, there's something, perhaps, we should talk about...

BERNIECE

Fine. Fine. Let's just cancel it. The whole wedding. The reception. The receiving line. My life.

(striding to a woman on a ladder)

Let's just say to your cousin Ellen, who's travelled over 250 miles in a used camper with colicky toddlers and an unemployed husband, Ellen, go home.

She strides over to Aunt Becky, standing on another ladder.

BERNIECE

Let's just say to your Aunt Becky, who has always called me the country mouse, who has always said, Berniece, you'll never have a wedding, not with those boys, let's just tell her, Becky, you were right on the money. Bingo.

Becky gives a thumbs-up signal. Berniece puts her hands on the shoulders of Aunt Susan, who sits at a table, folding napkins.

BERNIECE

And let's just say to your Aunt Susan, Susan, we know you've had a triple bypass and a hip replacement and you've lost your daughter in a freak laundry accident and the only possible joy in your life was going to be getting to see your favorite nephew get married, let's tell her Susan, head back to the hospital. Grab a respirator. Intensive Care.

Aunt Susan suddenly begins having trouble breathing.

BERNIECE

The family together, in happiness and health? Gee, sounds like a nightmare. Emily in white satin, down to God-bless-her 120? Sorry, sweetheart, you just lost three more pounds -- your heart.

(MORE)

BERNIECE (CONT'D)
Eternal love and romance and your
father bursting with pride and
spending his life savings on white
crepe paper and twinkle lights and
your happiness, because that's all
we've ever cared about in this world?
(to the room)

Tear it down! Torch it! The whole
shebang! Our "White Roses -- A
Wonderful Wedding Wonderland In The
Clouds"? Why, according to Howard,
it's a vision of hell!

HOWARD
(after a beat, weakly)
Mom? Dad?

FRANK
Yes, son?

HOWARD
(surrendering)
Just nerves.

BERNIECE
(joyously, to the room)
Just nerves!

All the workers smile and laugh and begin chattering, resuming
their tasks.

AUNT BECKY
Berniece! Good save!

FRANK
Walter?

WALTER
All set!

HOWARD
I have to get back to school, I have
a meeting...

Frank flips a wall switch. Suddenly the room is in darkness,
lit only by the miles of twinkle lights and the rotating mirror
balls.

EVERYONE
(overwhelmed by the
spectacle)
Ooooooh...

INT. HALLIWELL'S-OFFICE

Halliwell is standing by his window, looking out. There is a
KNOCK at the door. Halliwell shuts the blinds.

HOWARD
(entering)

Tom?

HALLIWELL
(very jovial)
Howard! Well, come on in.

HOWARD
You wanted to see me?

HALLIWELL
And to see more of you. Have a seat.
Can I get you anything? Coffee?

Tea? A new house?
(he laughs)

I'm kidding!

(Howard tries to laugh
as well)

Hooligans. And all those reporters.
Your life. These past few days. I
can only imagine.

HOWARD
I'm fine, it's all been some sort of
absurd cosmic mistake...

HALLIWELL
Has it?

HOWARD
Yes. Of course.

HALLIWELL
Of course. It's just, well -- I'm
concerned about you. We all are.

HOWARD
We?

HALLIWELL
There have been letters. Quite a
few, actually. And calls.

HOWARD
About me? From whom?

HALLIWELL
Howard, do you enjoy teaching?

HOWARD
No. I don't enjoy it.

HALLIWELL
You don't?

HOWARD
I love it. It's -- my life.

HALLIWELL

So -- would you miss it?

HOWARD

Are you... are you threatening me?

HALLIWELL

No. Of course not. I'm your friend.
Friends don't threaten.

HOWARD

No they don't.

HALLIWELL

They warn. You are getting married,
correct?

HOWARD

Of course. In three days.

HALLIWELL

Thank God. And Miss Montgomery.
Once you are married, we'll be safe.
Home free.

HOWARD

What do you mean? Home free?

HALLIWELL

This is a small town. Everyone knows
your business. Everyone is watching.
You are not Michael Jackson. Or
Socrates. I hope.

HOWARD

You mean, if I wasn't getting
married, I'd... I'd be fired?

HALLIWELL

But it's not an issue, is it? Your
marriage?

HOWARD

(after a beat)

No.

HALLIWELL

(a big smile)
Best wishes.

INT. EMILY'S APARTMENT

ANGLE on the TV set; RICHARD SIMMONS is leading an aerobic
workout.

RICHARD

Step, lunge, step, lunge, you can do
it!

Emily wears a leotard and follows Richard's every move. There is a POUNDING on her front door. Emily switches OFF the sound on the TV, and opens the door. Howard stands outside, in a wildly agitated state.

EMILY

Howard?

HOWARD

We're getting married. We are getting married!

EMILY

I know. Howard, I'm drenched, let me put on...

HOWARD

(cutting her off)

We can do this! I can do this! I'm a man!

EMILY

Of course you are.

HOWARD

And I can prove it!

EMILY

(confused)

Howard?

Howard tries to rip off his shirt; he struggles out of it.

HOWARD

No more waiting. No more romance. You're moist and sweaty! You're oozing love fluid!

EMILY

(sniffing herself)

I'm sorry, I was doing Richard...

HOWARD

I love it! I need it! We are going to be man and wife! In every sense of the word! Right now!

EMILY

Howard?

HOWARD

(scornfully)

Who's gay?

Howard grabs Emily and kisses her, very passionately.

EMILY

Howard!

They kiss again, even more passionately.

EMILY

Howard?

Howard, very upset, hurls Emily onto the bed, and climbs on top of her. He kisses her one more time; the kiss is volcanic and effortful; Howard seems to be trying to chew Emily's face off. ANGLE on Howard's face as he kisses Emily, his eyes squeezed shut with determination. Still kissing, he opens them.

HIS POV: Over Emily's shoulder; Richard Simmons on the television, staring right at him. Howard screams and jumps up.

EMILY

Howard? What is all this?

HOWARD

I'm sorry! I'm... I'm under a lot of pressure! Turn him off!

EMILY

Howard -- it's alright!
(turning OFF the TV)
It's a tape.

HOWARD

I'm... I'm...

He starts to hyperventilate.

EMILY

Howard -- calm down. I love you.
I'm not worried.

HOWARD

You don't understand! It's not me!
It's... it's... everyone!
Everything! The school board! Aunt Becky! The Oscars! The Mid-East!

EMILY

The Mid-East?

HOWARD

How can I have sex when people are dying?

EMILY

Howard?

HOWARD

It's terrible! It's unbearable!
Pakistan! Bosnia! Apartheid! I
don't think there's a man alive who
can become aroused under these
conditions!

EMILY
(bewildered)
But -- apartheid is over.

HOWARD
(frantic)
But the memory! Vietnam, Cambodia,
did you see "Miss Saigon"?

EMILY
You lent me the CD...

HOWARD
I can't take it! Any of this! Not
one more minute! One more second!

EMILY
(trying to please)
I'll give it back!

HOWARD
You don't understand! She's going to
die! Aunt Susan! If I don't get
married, something will rupture!
She'll have a stroke! She'll need
another hip!

EMILY
(taking charge)
Howard. Listen to me. She's not
going to rupture. And of course
you're going crazy. You have every
right.

HOWARD
I do?

EMILY
Look at your life. The Oscars. Your
house. The press. But it doesn't
matter. Not one little bit, not any
of it.

HOWARD
Why not?

EMILY
(the drill sergeant)
Because I love you! And we are
getting married. I have lost 75
pounds. I have become a new person
so that we could get married and go
to Paris and Rome and start a
wonderful new life together. You
still want that, don't you, Howard?
That's why I transformed myself,
isn't it? Do you want me to start
eating again?

HOWARD

No...

EMILY

I can, Howard. I'm very fragile. Don't do this to me. Don't be my Hostess Cupcake. Don't be my Devil Dog. I can smell them, Howard. I can taste them. Mallomars. Chip-a-roo's. Oreo Double-Stuf. Wait up, guys! I'm coming!

HOWARD

I have to go!

Howard grabs his shirt and runs out of the room. Emily begins taking very deep breaths, trying to control her panic and her hunger pangs. She grabs a carrot stick and chomps on it. She turns the TV back ON, and begins working out to the tape, with great determination.

RICHARD SIMMONS

(on TV)

One, two, one, two...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Howard is driving through town crazily, at breakneck speed. He nears an intersection.

ANGLE on the stoplight, turning yellow.

ANGLE on Howard, wild-eyed behind the wheel. He FLOORS it.

ANGLE on another car, heading through the intersection.

Howard CRASHES into the other car, sending it spinning.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY

Howard gets out of his car, his shirt barely on. Peter gets out of the other car. He is unhurt.

PETER

Howard! What are you doing? What is going on?

HOWARD

I'm gay! I'm gay! There, I said it! There's your story! There's your headline! "Howard Brackett is a big homo queer mary sissy man! Film at 11!" In Armani! Are you happy now?

PETER

"Homo queer mary sissy man." That could work. What are you talking about?

HOWARD

I'm gay! I've always been gay! I've known it my whole life. I never wanted it, I ignored it, I pushed it away. I did everything I could. And now -- I could lose everything!

PETER

Lose what?

HOWARD

The best job in the world. My family around me. A great place to live. That's all I need!

PETER

What about romance? Love? Sex?
Have you ever had sex? With a guy?

HOWARD

Of course! At college, on vacations.. Years ago. But I've sworn off! I have made a deal. A bargain. I know -- I will never have passion. A love life. A person. But that's okay. I have so much else!

PETER

But why can't you have everything?
Or at least try for it? Why can't you live here, and be gay?

HOWARD

Because this is Greenleaf! It's the real world! It's Indiana! It's me!

Peter grabs Howard and kisses him. The kiss starts to get passionate. Both men break away, stunned by their feelings.

HOWARD

Why... why did you do that?

PETER

Because I wanted to. So I wouldn't have to slap you. Because that's what you're leaving out, of your demented little bargain.

HOWARD

What?

PETER

Your life! Howard, you're allowed to kiss people! And... and...

HOWARD

What?

PETER

(stunned)

You're good at it. Oh my God. Oh my God. Get away from me.

HOWARD

No problem!

PETER

I can't do this. Not with a closetcase. This is big trouble. This is therapy bonus coupons. You are not my type!

HOWARD

Your type? Excuse me?

PETER

No farmboys. No hicks. No -- Howard Bracketts.

HOWARD

You are so sleazy. You are just what I don't want to become. Cheap gay show business trash. With frosted hair.

PETER

Chickenshit.

HOWARD

Gossip whore.

PETER

Closetcase.

HOWARD

Hack.

PETER

(the ultimate insult)
High school English teacher.

Howard and Peter are overwhelmingly attracted to each other. Against both their better judgements, they rush together for another kiss. Just as they do, a car horn HONKS.

BERNIECE

Hello, sweetheart!

Howard screams; he and Peter leap apart. Frank and Berniece pull up in their station wagon. Berniece leans out the window.

BERNIECE

That's right! It's the cake!

ANGLE on the wedding cake, in the back of the station wagon.

FRANK
Who's your friend?

HOWARD
No one!

PETER
(introducing himself)
Peter Malloy.

BERNIECE
Of course, from TV. Well, if you're
Howard's buddy, I do hope you'll be
coming to the wedding.

PETER
(to Howard)
The wedding?

HOWARD
(determined)
Sunday morning. Nine AM.

Howard, a complete wreck, gets into his car and speeds away.

BERNIECE
Oh those jitters. You men. Were you
like this, before your wedding day?

PETER
I'm not married.

FRANK
Another one.

BERNIECE
See you in church!

Berniece and Frank drive off. Peter reaches into his car and grabs his car phone.

EXT. CAMERON DRAKE'S HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a pricey, secluded Brentwood home, ultra-landscaped. A phone is RINGING.

INT. CAMERON'S BEDROOM

A large, airy room with an enormous low bed. Sonya is lying face down on the bed, asleep. The phone continues to RING. Sonya's hand makes a futile half-gesture toward the bedside phone.

EXT. CAMERON'S POOL - DAY

A lovingly landscaped pool, with a striped cabana. Cameron lies dozing on a lounge chair; he wears a black t-shirt, boxer shorts and a silk robe.

He is surrounded by piles of scripts, beer cans, overflowing ashtrays and his Oscar. Atop the scripts is a ragged copy of "Romeo and Juliet." His cellular phone continues to RING. He rouses himself to pick it up.

CAMERON

(into phone)

Drake... yeah... Peter who? What?

INT. BEDROOM

Sonya is still in bed. Cameron appears; he begins rummaging through closets and drawers, pulling on clothes.

CAMERON

Babe, wake up. We gotta go.

SONYA

(groggy)

Where?

CAMERON

Greenleaf. It's my teacher, he's in trouble. This guy called, he says I have to do something. Like, fix it.

SONYA

But I promised Isaac I'd do his show. The new collection. It's this afternoon. I have to shower and vomit.

CAMERON

I need you.

SONYA

But it's Isaac...

CAMERON

I love you. I disfigured myself..

He shows his tattoo.

SONYA

That isn't enough. To build a relationship.

CAMERON

Private plane? Dom Perignon?
Smoking?

SONYA

(after a beat, sincerely)
I love you so much.

She begins to climb out of bed.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

We see Howard, looking grim, behind the wheel of his car.

The car passes a sign which reads "SPRINGFIELD - 50 MILES."

EXT. HILLTOP - NIGHT

A moonlit make-out spot. Parked cars are filled with hormonal teenage couples.

INT. MEREDITH'S CAR

Meredith and Jack are making out. Meredith pulls away.

JACK

What? What's wrong?

MEREDITH

I just... I keep thinking about Mr. Brackett. And his house. Why would somebody do that?

JACK

You know why.

MEREDITH

Why? 'Cause they think he's gay?

JACK

But he's not!

MEREDITH

But there are all those other gay people. Like Melissa Etheridge. Or Boy George. Or Michael Jackson.

JACK

But he's not!

MEREDITH

I know, but he still seems -- sweet. And gentle. And sensitive.

JACK

And weird. Meredith, do you think that all gay people can sing?

MEREDITH

You're not even trying! To understand!

Meredith jumps out of the car, in a huff. Jack follows her.

JACK

Merry!

EXT. BENCH - NIGHT

Meredith marches over to a bench and sits. Jack follows her.

JACK

What is it with you?

MEREDITH

I'm just getting kind of major-ly tired of Mike Sturgo and the track team and all of you guys. I mean, it wouldn't hurt you to be a little sensitive!

JACK

Excuse me?

MEREDITH

I mean, maybe if you were gay you'd treat me better!

JACK

If I were gay I wouldn't treat you at all!

MEREDITH

You know what I mean!

JACK

No I don't!

MEREDITH

Just try it!

JACK

Try what?

MEREDITH

Try being, sort of -- gay.

JACK

You are gone. You are totally wacked.

MEREDITH

Fuck you! Be a little fucking sensitive!

JACK

I am fucking sensitive!

MEREDITH

You're a pig!

JACK

Fine! Fine! What do you want? Should I wear lip gloss? And a miniskirt? Should I join the drama club? Rent some English movie?

MEREDITH
No. Just -- experiment. Okay,
pretend I'm one of your kind of guys.
Some real primate. Pretend I'm Mike
Sturgo.

JACK
What?

MEREDITH
And you love me.

JACK
What is this? "X-Files"? Are you
having your...

MEREDITH
(standing up)
I'm going home. See ya.

JACK
(as she starts to leave)
No! Don't! Come on!
(he takes a deep breath)
Mike.

MEREDITH
(turning)
Michael.

JACK
Michael.

MEREDITH
Oh, Jack, isn't it a lovely night?

JACK
Lovely?

MEREDITH
It's gay talk. Look at the moon.
Isn't it -- nocturnal?

JACK
And... wondrous.

MEREDITH
And... iridescent-y.

JACK
It's... it's... le moon.

MEREDITH
Oh, Jack...

JACK
(nuzzling her)
Mike... Michael... oh, man, Mike...

MIKE (O.S.)

Yeah?

Meredith and Jack leap up; Mike is standing nearby, having emerged from one of the cars.

MEREDITH

Oh my God!

JACK

We were just -- fooling around!

MIKE

I bet you were! I'll fuckin' say!

JACK

That's it! I can't take this! All this Mr. Brackett stuff!

Jack runs off. Vicky sticks her head out of a nearby car.

VICKY

What? What's going on?

MEREDITH

Jack was being all like, gay and sensitive, and Mike ruined it! I swear, Jack was being so sweet, I would do anything for him! Jack!

Meredith runs off after Jack.

VICKY

(to Mike)

How come you can't be like that?

MIKE

Like what?

VICKY

Like Mr. Brackett. Or some poet guy.

MIKE

Like a homo?

VICKY

You are so crude! You're like some big sloppy dog, you got nacho dip all over my blouse! I want to go home!

MIKE

(as Vicky starts to get back in the car)

No! Not yet! Come on... Jack...

VICKY

(turning)

What?

MIKE
I love you -- Jack.

VICKY
Really?

MIKE
Your hair is so... illuminated.
Jack.

VICKY
(entranced by Mike's
newfound sensitivity)
Ooooh...

Vicky drapes herself over Mike and begins kissing him.

MIKE
(singing softly)
BILLIE JEAN IS NOT MY LOVER...

EXT. SPRINGFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER - NIGHT

A bland brick building in a town several counties over from Greenleaf. A few cars are parked out front; otherwise, the area is deserted. Howard's car pulls into the parking area.

INT. SPRINGFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER BASEMENT

A depressing, wood-panelled basement, with a linoleum floor; banners from various veterans' groups hang limply on the walls, and there is an American flag on a stand in the corner.

A group of three MEN have gathered; they are all extremely ordinary-looking, in chinos and windbreakers. They look like they met comparing mowers at Sears. Leading the group is DR. TED MINDLEY, a middle-aged man with mutton-chop sideburns, a brown turtleneck, corduroys and sandals. The group members sit in folding chairs.

TED
Welcome. Good to see you all. I'd just like to open by saying how encouraged I was by our last meeting.

Howard enters the room, cautiously.

TED
Yes?

HOWARD
Um, hi. Is this the "You Can Change" group?

TED
Why, yes, yes it is. And you must be Gregory. You called.

HOWARD

Yes, yes I am. I'd just like to... audit, if I could. Just -- sit in.

TED

Don't be frightened. We're all here for the same reason, Greg. We're all uncomfortable with the homosexual lifestyle. And we all know that...

ALL THE MEN

You can change.

HOWARD

Right. Right. Good.

TED

Take a seat.

Howard grabs a folding chair and sits.

TED

I'd like to begin today by hearing from you guys. Brian?
(no one answers)

Brian?

BRIAN

.(who's clearly using
an alias)
Oh, right. Me. Brian. I'm Brian.
Okay. Well, I had a good week.
Great week. I was tempted, sure,
sure. I was channel surfing, and
suddenly, Channel 9 -- "Baywatch."

All the guys in the group nod; they understand the problem.

BRIAN

David Hasselhoff. He still looks
great.

TED

(concerned)

Bri?

BRIAN

(catching himself)
But that Pam Anderson! Whoo-eee!

All the guys give extremely forced wolf whistles and stamp their feet.

BRIAN

But I didn't want to be tempted, so I just turned the channel. CNN. No problem.

TED
That's great. Good goin'. Greg?
(no one answers)
Greg? Gregory? New guy?

HOWARD
Oh, right. Yes. Yes?

TED
Are you involved in the homosexual lifestyle?

HOWARD
No. Oh no. I mean, no. I don't watch.

TED
Then why are you here? Among friends?

HOWARD
Well, I just... I just... sometimes I feel... certain... urges... and I was wondering about... controlling them. Forever.

STU
Urges? You mean like... towards men? You know what I do? Turn it right off. Go on the wagon. Head right for something healthy. Manly. Like I bowl. Or I build something, in my home workshop. I use tools. Or I go to a movie. "Lethal Weapon." Or "Die Hard." Or one of those things with what's-his-name, he's a tough guy, that Jean-Claude Van Damme.

The group cannot help itself; everyone gives a big, yearning sigh.

BRIAN
"Bloodsport"!

BILL
"Cyborg"!

STU
But in "Sudden Death" he didn't take off anything!

The guys start protesting Jean-Claude remaining clothed.

TED
Guys! Men! Stop it! We're off the track! Let's do an exercise. Pull back. Greg, we go around the circle.
(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)
I say a word, and you reply
immediately, without thinking. Gut
response. Eventually, we'll
recondition our patterns of arousal.

STU
(to Howard)
I like this one.

TED
Stu?

STU
Sorry.

TED
Let's go.
(he points to Brian)
Man.

BRIAN
Woman.

Everyone looks at Brian approvingly.

TED
(to Bill)
Husband.

BILL
Wife.

TED
(to Stu)
Beer.

STU
Eew...
(he catches himself
and butches up)
Suds.

TED
(to Howard)
Pussy.

HOWARD
Cat.
(he catches himself)
Hound.

Everyone nods at Howard encouragingly. The exercise begins to go faster.

TED
Babe.

BRIAN
Fox.

TED
Cheerleader.

BILL
Chick.

TED
Supermodel.

STU
Cindy.

TED
Sex machine.

HOWARD
Streisand. Young Streisand.

There is a pause. Then everyone nods vigorously, agreeing that this is a good answer.

TED
Breasts.

BRIAN
Big.

TED
Skin.

BILL
Smooth.

TED
Legs.

STU
Long.

TED
Love.

HOWARD
(without thinking)
Peter.

TED
Peter?

STU
Peter Malloy?

BRIAN
From "Inside Entertainment"?

BILL
He's a dream!

The guys all moan in ecstasy.

JACK (O.S.)
Mr. Brackett?

Howard looks up. Jack has entered the room.

TED
Yes, young man?

HOWARD
Jack?

JACK
(panicking)
Oh my God.

Jack turns and runs out of the room. Howard follows him.

HOWARD
Jack!

EXT. SPRINGFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER - NIGHT

Jack runs out of the building, into the parking lot. Howard follows him..

HOWARD
Jack!

Jack turns and faces Howard.

JACK
Are you gay?

HOWARD
No. No, no, no. Of course not.

JACK
Well, I am! Even when I'm with Meredith, when I shut my eyes, it's always -- guys! Everywhere I go, everything I do, it's all I think about, guys' bodies and guys' faces and guys' arms -- I mean, not yours -- but guys! I haven't even done anything about it, but I want to, I feel like I'm going to explode, it's like I want to go to the guy planet and be the king! I'm like a total pig!

HOWARD
Jack, you're young, these feelings can be... completely natural, it's fine... what's wrong with my arms?

JACK

Nothing, I mean, for a teacher, but - - I'm going away to college! I don't know if I can handle it! Being -- out! Safe sex! Other guys! What if nobody likes me, what if they think I'm a geek, what if they think I'm just some big dumb blond jock!

HOWARD

It can work...

JACK

But how? Mr. Brackett, I've always thought you were so great, I mean you're smart and everybody likes you, but look at your life. I mean, if somebody like you can't be gay, I don't stand a chance!

HOWARD

That's not true...

JACK

But it is! I've seen what you're going through, the way people are treating you, and if you have to hide, I guess -- maybe that's right. I guess I should try it, like -- for the rest of my life!

Jack starts to run off, toward his car.

HOWARD

Come back, we can talk about it!

JACK

(very upset; he sees through Howard's denials)

How can we? You're not gay!

Jack gets into his car and drives off. Howard stands rooted to the spot, paralyzed with fear and indecision. He watches Jack leave, and then stands alone in the deserted parking lot.

EXT. HALLIWELL'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Howard stands outside the front door, trying to pull himself together. He rings the bell. The door opens. Halliwell welcomes Howard.

HALLIWELL

Howard! You got my message.

INT. HALLIWELL'S LIVING ROOM

Halliwell brings Howard into the room. The nine members of the school board are seated, along with Ed and Ava.

HALLIWELL

Howard, I believe you know everyone
on the board.

HOWARD

Of course.

HALLIWELL

And the Kenrows.

ED

Welcome.

HOWARD

How are you?

HALLIWELL

We're all well. Very well.
Considering. And you?

HOWARD

Fine.

HALLIWELL

You must be wondering just what this
is all about.

HOWARD

Yes. Of course.

HALLIWELL

Well, that's understandable, isn't
it?

BOARD MEMBER #1

Oh, yes.

AVA

Of course.

HALLIWELL

This hasn't been easy. For any of
us.

HOWARD

What hasn't been?

HALLIWELL

Our decision. On your case.

HOWARD

My case?

HALLIWELL

Matters have grown a good deal more
serious. There has been -- evidence.

HOWARD
Of what?

ED
Howard, this morning someone left a note for you, in the teachers' room.

HOWARD
Who did? Where is it?

HALLIWELL
(holding the note)
Right here.

HOWARD
That's private property. You have no right to read that.

HALLIWELL
(reading the note aloud)
"Dear Mr. Brackett, Please don't mention what happened last night to anybody. If the guys on the team found out, I'd be dead. Thank you, I know you'll understand." The note is unsigned.

HOWARD
How dare you.

HALLIWELL
Excuse me? You are a teacher. This note is clearly from a student. A male student. We can only imagine what this implies.

HOWARD
It doesn't imply anything! It's completely innocent, and it's none of your business!

HALLIWELL
It most certainly is our business. And if you harbor any hope of remaining on our faculty, I advise you to cooperate fully with this investigation. We would like the student's name.

HOWARD
(a beat)
Why?

HALLIWELL
So his family can be notified. So he can be helped. Guided. Toward a decent life.

BOARD MEMBER #2
Masculine pursuits.AVA
Sports. A family. Algebra.

Ed mouths "thank you" to Ava.

HOWARD
You want me to -- out him?HALLIWELL
We want you to help him.HOWARD
I'm getting married tomorrow. I've denied everything. I've avoided the press. I've done everything you've asked. I've played the game. But that's my decision. And my life. You can't ask me to ruin someone else's.HALLIWELL
His name.

ANGLE on the faces of the school board, very implacable.

ANGLE on Ed and Ava, trying not to gloat.

ANGLE on Howard. He is very still.

EXT. CHURCH - 9 AM - THE NEXT MORNING

It is a beautiful sunny day; the church is surrounded by cars, and some latecomers are rushing into the building. The church steps are decorated for the wedding with white flowers and balloons.

INT. CHURCH SIDEROOM

This is the bride's chamber. Emily stands in her gown and veil, as Berniece and Trina fuss with her, fluffing her skirt, straightening the veil, etc. Trina is Emily's Maid Of Honor and Berniece is decked out in her Mother-Of-The-Groom best. JENNIFER, the six-year-old flower girl, sits in a chair in a ruffled Shirley Temple dress, playing with her basket of white rose petals and fidgeting.

EMILY
Is it all right? Is the veil crooked?BERNIECE
(stepping back)
It is -- perfect.
(MORE)

BERNIECE (CONT'D)

You are so beautiful. Like something right out of a storybook. You are just a perfect angel princess, you are everything I have ever dreamed of for a wedding and more.

TRINA

(admiring Emily)

Do you have an attorney?

BERNIECE

Hush. You are radiant.

EMILY

(overcome with emotion)

I can't believe it. After all those years. All those pounds. My life. It's finally starting.

JENNIFER

My mom says it won't last.

BERNIECE

(sweetly)

Your mom is an alcoholic.

INT. CHURCH SIDEROOM

This is the groom's chamber. Howard, Frank and Walter are all in their wedding attire. As Frank inspects Walter, Howard keeps trying to tie his own bowtie in a mirror. He is highly agitated, in a blind panic; he can't tie the tie.

HOWARD

I hate this!

FRANK

Son? Do you need help? .

HOWARD

I'm fine, I am fine, it's just...

(inspecting himself in
the mirror)

The dry-cleaner has left a shine on my trousers and the left lapel is slightly bent and the laundry did not use enough starch on my shirtfront! Where are we, the Ukraine? How can I get married? I look like a hobo!

Howard starts to hyperventilate; his eyes bulge and he cannot catch his breath.

WALTER

Howard?

FRANK

Son! What's wrong?

WALTER

I got him!

Walter grabs Howard from behind and starts to administer the Heimlich maneuver.

HOWARD

Stop it! Stop it!

Howard wrestles himself free from Walter.

HOWARD

What are you doing?

WALTER

That Heimlich thing! You were choking. See, now you're better.

HOWARD

I was not choking!

There is a KNOCK on the door, and Peter enters.

PETER

Howard?

(seeing Frank and Walter)

Oh, excuse me. Um, they're ready.

WALTER

Here we go!

FRANK

Howard?

HOWARD

Just give me a minute. Alone.

Frank and Walter exit. Peter begins to follow them out, then turns and stays, shutting the door.

PETER

You can't do this. I can't let you.

HOWARD

It's done. I am getting married.

PETER

But it isn't fair. To you. Or to Emily. Or to anyone.

HOWARD

This is the only way I can hurt the least possible number of people. I have to do this.

PETER

No you don't!

HOWARD

What do you want from me? Ratings?
A big finish? This isn't your scoop!
It's my life!

PETER

(staring straight at
Howard)

I know that. Do you see a camera?
Howard, all you have to say is -- no.
Everyone will understand.

HOWARD

On my wedding day?

PETER

Okay, please, let me put it another
way. All you have to say is -- yes.

Peter moves to kiss Howard. As they are about to embrace, the WEDDING MARCH is heard, and Walter pokes his head in. Peter and Howard freeze, with their arms around each other. Walter looks at them; he is very touched by their macho ritual.

WALTER

You guys...

Walter drapes himself over Peter and Howard, completing the group hug. Frank appears at the door.

FRANK

Howard?

HOWARD

Coming!

Frank exits. Howard extricates himself from the hug, takes one last, helpless glance at Peter, and exits. Walter claps Peter on the back, and they exit as well.

INT. CHURCH

The place is packed, with the extended Brackett family, various Brackett friends and neighbors and the more warmhearted faculty members, Jack, Meredith, Vicky, Mike and Peter, all very dressed up.

ANGLE on Jennifer, coming down the aisle, tossing white rose petals.

ANGLE on Emily, coming down the aisle after Jennifer, on Frank's arm, as the WEDDING MARCH is heard. Emily is radiant, her eyes brimming with joyous tears; she floats. Frank beams.

ANGLE on the altar. FATHER TIM is conducting the ceremony; he smiles as Emily approaches. Already in place are Walter, as Best Man, Trina, as Maid of Honor, and Howard, who is trying to smile and look appropriately joyful. Berniece sits in the front pew, already weeping and dabbing at her eyes with Kleenex.

Emily reaches the altar; she and Howard face each other. Frank sits in the front pew, beside Berniece. He gives Howard the thumbs-up sign. Berniece sobs loudly; she holds up a hand, composing herself. The MUSIC STOPS.

FATHER TIM

Dearly, dearly beloved, we are gathered here to join this wonderful couple in the state of holiest matrimony, before the eyes of God.

QUICK CUTS to various crucifixes, stained glass windows and statues of saints; all of these stern religious icons seem to be glowering at Howard.

ANGLE on Howard, who is sweating and breathing heavily, very uncomfortable. Walter nudges him playfully, and points to a stained glass window or painting which depicts the flaming torments of hell.

FATHER TIM

Before we begin the vows, is there anyone present who knows of a reason why this couple should not be joined in holy wedlock?

ANGLE on Trina; her eyes widen.

ANGLE on Meredith, Jack, Vicky and Mike. Before Mike can say anything, Vicky pinches him, behind the pew.

MIKE

Oww!

ANGLE on a group of Brackett aunts, uncles and cousins, all smiling, their faces frozen with politeness.

ANGLE on Walter, who mimes zipping his lips.

ANGLE on Peter, staring right at Howard.

ANGLE on the entire congregation, shifting in their seats.

Berniece is staring straight ahead. She turns her head slightly to one side, as a warning to the congregation. The threat is tiny but volcanic. The entire congregation sits back in their pews.

FATHER TIM

Anyone? No?

ANGLE on Emily, oblivious and beaming.

FATHER TIM

Very good. Because let us remember, a marriage is a truly blessed event. It must be a union based in the deepest love, total kinship and absolute honesty.

ANGLE on Howard. While remaining frozen, he takes a deep breath.

FATHER TIM

Let's begin. Do you, Emily, take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, till death do you part?

EMILY

(with deep and loving sincerity)

I do.

ANGLE on Berniece, shaking her head at the beauty of the moment.

FATHER TIM

And do you, Howard, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, till death do you part?

ANGLE on Howard, as he tries to speak. His throat is bone dry. He swallows. His lips begin to move, but no sound emerges.

ANGLE on the congregation; as one, everyone leans slightly forward in suspense.

ANGLE on Frank, looking concerned.

ANGLE on Berniece, trying to will Howard's answer. She shuts her eyes and tips her face heavenward, for a brief prayer.

ANGLE on Jack, watching Howard.

ANGLE on Emily, gazing at Howard, smiling expectantly.

ANGLE on Peter, staring at Howard.

FATHER TIM

Howard?

HOWARD

I... I'm... gay.

FATHER TIM

Pardon?

HOWARD

I'm... gay.

ANGLE on the congregation; every jaw has dropped.

ANGLE on Emily, frozen.

EMILY

You're... what?

JENNIFER
(whispering, to Emily)
He's gay.

EMILY
I heard him!

Berniece stands up. She turns and faces the congregation. She smiles, in her most gracious, hostess-y manner.

BERNIECE
Everyone? What Howard meant to say was, he's having a wonderful day.

HOWARD
Mom.

FRANK
(to Howard)
What is this -- codeine?

HOWARD
Mom, Dad, Walter -- I'm gay.

WALTER
(looking around)
Whoa. Whoa.

AUNT BECKY
(to her neighbor)
I win the bet.

EMILY
Three years...

HOWARD
I am so sorry...

EMILY
Three years...

HOWARD
I don't expect you to forgive me, any of you...

EMILY
Seventy-five pounds...

HOWARD
I know. I know. I never should have let things get this far, I'm a horrible person and you have every right to hate me, you should hate me, I insist you hate me, keep the ring, keep the plane tickets, punch me, shoot me, I won't blame you, I deserve it, and I'm... garbage and scum and vermin and lint and... I'm sorry.

EMILY

You're sorry? You're sorry? After... after I wait for you, no, not just three years -- my entire life? Since first grade? After I plan my entire future around our wedding? After I base my entire concept of self-esteem on the fact that you're willing to marry me?

HOWARD

I know. I know.

EMILY

(with mounting intensity) I am wearing a wedding dress, which you picked out. I highlighted my hair because you said I needed shimmer. I loved you and believed you and pretended not to notice the Streisand thing. I thought you were just creative, I thought you were just more sensitive, and smarter than me and more interesting. I thought you were the most wonderful man who ever lived, I thought you could change my life and show me the whole world and teach me about art and life and magic. I thought you could make me feel like a beautiful woman, instead of the girl nobody wanted!

(turning to the crowd)

Does anyone here know how many times I've had to watch "Funny Lady"?

HOWARD

It was a sequel, she was under contract...

EMILY

Fuck Barbra Streisand!

ANGLE on the congregation. Everyone is shocked at Emily's courage and rebellion.

CONGREGATION

Oooh...

EMILY

(to Howard)
And you!

Emily hauls off and slugs Howard, landing a solid right hook on his jaw. He hits the floor. Emily marches down the aisle, absolutely livid.

Emily reaches the end of the aisle. She stares at the bouquet in her hand; she hurls it to the floor and stomps on it. She exits.

ANGLE on Howard, crawling down the aisle, clutching his jaw.

HOWARD

Munchkin...

Howard stands and half-stumbles, half-runs down the aisle and out the door. Peter runs out after him. There is a pause, and then the congregation erupts into furious gossip.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

As Howard lurches out of the church, Emily's car ROARS past him; a good chunk of Emily's wedding gown is caught in the door. She sprays Howard with gravel and zooms off.

Peter appears from the church; he is thrilled by the turn of events.

PETER

Howard, you were incredible! You did it!

HOWARD

What?

PETER

That was amazing! I wish we were filming! Maybe we can do a re-enactment -- you came out! For me!

Peter tries to hug Howard, who pulls away.

HOWARD

For you? Excuse me? I -- I just ruined that woman's life!

PETER

You saved her life. She was making a huge mistake.

HOWARD

(in a state of shock)
I... I... I can't believe I did that. That I said that. At my wedding. In front of everyone. My family. My friends. My mom. My dad.

PETER

You were terrific. You couldn't go through with it.

HOWARD

Why? Why couldn't I? What is wrong with me? What am I? Who am I?

PETER

You're -- out.

HOWARD

I'm out? You're right. I'm out of my family. I'm out of my church. I'm out of a job.

PETER

What?

HOWARD

They fired me. The school board. Or I quit. I don't even know anymore! I've quit everything! I've quit my life!

PETER

You've started your life. Maybe our life.

HOWARD

I just came out! At my wedding! I'm a lunatic! I'm an idiot! I should never have even thought about it, I never should have...

PETER

Told the truth?

HOWARD

Listened to you!

Howard gets into his car.

PETER

Howard!

Howard's car jerks into reverse and then lurches forward, out of the parking lot. Tin cans and a "Just Married" sign have been attached to the car. Howard drives away.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Cameron's private jet has landed. Cameron and Sonya, both wearing sunglasses, step out of the plane, and look around.

SONYA

(referring to her shoulderbag)

Why am I carrying this? Cam, where are the people? Who carry things?

CAMERON

I don't know. This is Greenleaf.

SONYA

Cam, if you loved me you would pay someone. That's what love is.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - LATER THAT DAY

The hall is completely and perfectly decorated, for the reception which has been cancelled. Berniece, still in her wedding outfit, stands staring at all the unused splendor. All of the female Brackett relatives surround her. Everyone stares at the room.

BERNIECE

You know, I can understand about... Howard being gay. But I will never, ever understand, as long as I live, with God as my witness -- how could he not want a wedding?

SUSAN

Berniece -- maybe he just didn't like Emily. And he was just trying to let her down easy.

AUNT BECKY

(sarcastic)

Good job.

BERNIECE

So I suppose we should... take all this down.

ELLEN

Berniece, we don't have to do it today. Maybe Howard will change his mind.

BERNIECE

(a ray of hope)

Do you think? Could this have all just been -- jitters? Or, or, a practical joke, one of those fraternity things?

SUSAN

Maybe he had to say it -- maybe he's being blackmailed. By -- sinister forces.

ELLEN

Maybe he just went psycho. He could be institutionalized, and then after treatments, and electro-shock, everything could be fine.

BERNIECE

(hopefully)

We could freeze everything.

AUNT BECKY

Ladies. Bernie. He's gay. He's gone. Get over it.

Becky takes a big swipe of frosting from the wedding cake and samples it.

BERNIECE

Becky -- don't!

AUNT BECKY

Berniece, listen to me. All those years, when I told you there wasn't going to be a Brackett wedding -- I wasn't being mean. Just -- factual. Your Howard, and your Walter -- they're good boys. They're just not -- grooms.

BERNIECE

But... but... why?

AUNT BECKY

Because Howard is gay, and Walter is... his brother. There's no shame in that.

SUSAN

Why, my next door neighbor, back in Evanston -- he's gay. He's a plumber.

BERNIECE

Really?

COUSIN MARGARET

And remember Cousin Floyd, that Navy captain? He never married. And he lived with that nice fellow, with the hairpiece.

BERNIECE

That's true.

ELLEN

There are gay people everywhere. I read about it, in People magazine. Doctors and lawyers, even chefs. Why, in Hawaii, they're even talking about letting gay people get married. Legally. Weddings and all.

BERNIECE

(getting excited)

Weddings? Like, with receiving lines?

AUNT BECKY

Down, girl.

EXT. HOWARD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Frank's car pulls up out front, and Frank marches up to the house. He rings the bell; there is no answer. The house seems dark and deserted.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM

The room is in darkness. Frank opens the front door.

FRANK

Howard?

ANGLE on Howard, sitting very still on the couch, in the dark.

HOWARD

(after a beat, not moving)

What?

Frank flips on the lights.

HOWARD

(exasperated)

Dad...

FRANK

So.

HOWARD

So?

FRANK

So you're still -- gay?

HOWARD

Yes.

FRANK

I have to tell you. I do not understand it. Are you... going to have an operation?

HOWARD

What?

FRANK

I'm just asking. Don't bite my head off. Will you be... going into show business?

HOWARD

Absolutely. Vegas.

FRANK

Don't take that tone. I am... making an effort. I'm a farmer. Was it that Barbra Streisand? Did she do something to you?

HOWARD

She had nothing to do with it! And lots of straight people like Barbra Streisand!

FRANK

If she asked you to drink poison...

HOWARD

Dad! Why did you come here? To make me feel even more rotten?

FRANK

No. I came here because -- your mother asked me to. She was worried. That you weren't eating. She sent you this.

He holds out a soggy brown paper bag.

HOWARD

What is that?

FRANK

Wedding cake.

HOWARD

She's diabolical.

FRANK

She's insane. So what should I tell her? Will you be going to graduation tomorrow? Or are you walking out on that, too?

HOWARD

Yes, I am. They fired me.

FRANK

What?

HOWARD

Dad, this isn't my town. Or my school. Or my family. Not anymore. And if you'll excuse me...

ANGLE on a row of suitcases, lined up near the door.

FRANK

(after a beat)

Do you really think that?

HOWARD

(holding up the paper bag)

Exhibit A. With frosting.

Frank stares at Howard. He begins to leave. He pauses, and turns.

FRANK
Call.

Frank exits. Howard takes a deep breath. He looks in the bag -- it isn't pretty.

EXT. ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

A dive out on the highway. The place is lit up with neon, and the parking lot is full. Country-western MUSIC is heard from within.

INT. ROADHOUSE

The place is dimly lit, with patrons playing pool, dancing on a tiny dance floor, and drinking at the bar.

Peter sits at the bar, nursing a beer. He finishes the bottle, and adds it to a row of empties.

PETER
(to the Bartender)
Hit me.

As the BARTENDER gets Peter another beer, Emily enters the bar, still in her wedding dress. She is an emotional mess; she looks both destroyed and distracted, like she's trying to remember the license plate number of the truck that hit her. She seats herself on the bar stool next to Peter. She has been weeping.

EMILY
(to the Bartender)
Could I... could I get... a drink?

BARTENDER
What kind?

EMILY
What... what kind? I... I...

PETER
Vodka. Straight up.

EMILY
(decisively)
That's right. And some peanuts.
Lots of 'em.

PETER
Whoa.

EMILY
I don't care! I don't care about
anything anymore!
(MORE)

EMILY (CONT'D)

(to the Bartender)

Have you got chips? Or cupcakes? Or
Milanos? I wanna eat. I wanna
gorge! Have you ever looked at
Richard Simmons? Really looked?
He's flabby! He can't tuck his shirt
in!

PETER

That's right.

EMILY

You're -- from TV. You're that guy.
What are you doing here?

PETER

I'm trying to get very, very drunk.
Because I've had a bad day. A very
bad day.

EMILY

(a long beat as she
stares at Peter)

Excuse me?

PETER

You win.

EMILY

I hate men.

PETER

Me too.

EMILY

I think they're disgusting.

PETER

Tell me about it.

EMILY

I think men suck.

PETER

Don't go there.

EMILY

Look at me -- do I look fat?

PETER

No.

EMILY

Am I so repulsive? That no man would
want me?

PETER

You're very attractive.

EMILY

Howard didn't think so. Howard
didn't want me.

PETER

You'll meet someone. Someone worthy
of you. Someone who's right for you.
(regarding the dress)
Once you... change.

EMILY

I don't want to change! I'm sick of
changing! And it doesn't work! I'm
still a spinster! I'm a crone! I'm
a tree stump!

PETER

You have to believe me. It was
Howard's problem, not yours. He
should have told you, years ago.
You're still young, you can still
have a great life.

EMILY

(sincerely)

I love you. You're so nice. And
sweet.

PETER

I am not sweet. I'm a hack. I'm
show business garbage. Good-looking,
charming, beautifully dressed show
business garbage.

EMILY

Will you... will you... sleep with
me?

PETER

What?

EMILY

Three years.

PETER

Oh my God.

EMILY

Three years of sunsets. And long
talks. And supportive, loving
friendship.

PETER

Oh my God.

EMILY
This is my wedding night! I'm there!
I'm ready! This is a medical
condition!

(she downs her vodka in one
gulp, and points to a bar
patron at random)
You! Yeah! Will you have sex with
me? Right now! Come on!

PATRON #1
Oh gee, thanks, but -- no. I really
have to get home.

EMILY
Somebody? Anybody? It's free! No
strings! A la carte! You!
(she points to another
Patron)
Let's go! We'll have fun! I
promise! I have a coffeemaker!

PATRON #2
Sorry. Long day. But I appreciate
it.

EMILY
(standing)
What is this? A school night?
What's wrong with everybody? What's
wrong with me?
(a terrible thought
occurs to her)
Oh my God. Oh my God. Is this a gay
bar?

ANGLE on the full crowd, which is mostly ordinary, blue-collar
males, except for a few lesbian couples. Everyone nods, "Well,
yeah," including Peter.

EMILY
(to the heavens)
Are you done yet?

Emily grabs a fistful of peanuts and lurches out of the bar.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Emily runs out of the roadhouse, onto the highway. She runs
alongside a passing car.

EMILY
(yelling at the driver of
the car)
Are you gay? Is this the Twilight
Zone? Is everybody gay?

The car speeds away. Emily runs after another car. She
thrusts her thumb out to hitchhike.

EMILY
(to the car)
Will you marry me? Please? I have
plane tickets! I have the dress!

The car speeds away. Emily stands in the center of the highway, with her arms up, as a car comes right at her; she is brightly lit by the headlights.

EMILY
Stop! Stop! You have to stop! It's
an emergency! I need a heterosexual!
Code red!

The car SLAMS on its brakes, stopping inches from Emily. She slumps over the hood, writhing and moaning, although she hasn't been hit. Cameron gets out of the car. Emily doesn't see him at first.

CAMERON
Can I help you?

EMILY
No! No one can help me! I'm a jinx!
I'm the grinch! I'm beyond help!

CAMERON
(staring at her, not
sure he recognizes her)
Miss Montgomery?

EMILY
(looking up)
Cameron?

CAMERON
What... what happened to you?

EMILY
Everything! You won the Oscar and I
didn't believe you and I had no self-
esteem and Howard lied to me and...

CAMERON
(interrupting her babble)
No. I mean, your... body. What
happened?

EMILY
What happened? I was fat! And I
didn't think anyone would ever love
me so I got all these tapes and the
little step platform and hand weights
and a Health Rider and an Ab-Flex and
I ate celery and rice cakes and dry
popcorn and I put pictures of models
(MORE)

EMILY (CONT'D)
on my refrigerator and I swore I would become someone else, someone thin and pretty and popular, someone totally different and I did and I even ate those no-fat polyester potato chips and now I'm more miserable than ever! I'm a mess! And I'm starving!

CAMERON
But... why? Why did you do all that? You were... so beautiful.

EMILY
(after a beat, in disbelief)
I... I was?

CAMERON
I mean, you still are, you always were, it's just, skinny women are so... annoying sometimes, oh, but, you're not, are you? You're... you're just like I remember. From after school.

EMILY
You..., you remember?

CAMERON
"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Juliet is the sun."

EMILY
(after a beat)
"How comest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?"

CAMERON
"With love's light wings I did o'er perch these walls. For stony limits cannot hold love in."

EMILY
(correcting him)
"Out."

CAMERON
"Cannot hold love out."

Slow, romantic MUSIC is now heard, coming from the roadhouse. Emily stands up. She gazes into Cameron's eyes. He holds out his arms. She goes to him, and they begin to slow dance, to the music from the roadhouse.

EMILY
I've seen all your movies.

CAMERON
(thrilled)
Both of them?

EMILY
Five times. Each.

Emily slowly puts her head on Cameron's shoulder, and they continue dancing in the moonlight.

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

DISSOLVE as the sunlit stadium fills with students in caps-and-gowns, filling the neat rows of chairs set up on the field. The bleachers fill with parents, other relatives and friends. The high school BAND plays appropriate music as everyone gets settled.

ANGLE on a platform at one end of the field, with a lectern and a row of chairs. Various teachers, including Ed, Ava and Tom Halliwell mill about.

Peter stands to one side of the platform, with his camera crew. He approaches Trina.

PETER
(to Trina)
Has anyone seen Howard?

TRINA
Not since the happy occasion.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Howard stands alone, silhouetted against the sky, at the local Greyhound station. His suitcases are lined up beside him. He looks at his watch. It is 11:45.

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

ANGLE on Halliwell, at the podium.

HALLIWELL
(tapping the microphone)
Everyone? Can you hear me? It's almost noon -- and time for a very special Greenleaf graduation.

We hear a strange SOUND, of chanting and various musical instruments being played, with more volume than skill.

HALLIWELL
I'd like to welcome our students, our faculty, and all of the friends and family who have joined us here today.

The noise grows LOUDER.

HALLIWELL
Excuse me, what is the commotion?

ANGLE on the far end of the stadium. A group of about fifteen people, led by Frank and Berniece, carry signs and various noisemaking instruments. They are all nicely dressed, for the graduation ceremony. Their signs read "GAY POWER," "I AM PROUD OF MY GAY COUSIN" and "IT COULD BE WORSE."

BERNIECE
Mr. Principal! Oh, Mr. Halliwell!

HALLIWELL
Yes? What is this?

The pride group approaches the platform.

BERNIECE
We demand our rights! Reinstate my son!

HALLIWELL
Your son is not here. He is no longer a faculty member.

ANGLE on Jack, Meredith, Vicky and Mike, seated together, as the news of Howard's unemployment registers. All of the seniors look at each other.

JACK
(in disbelief)
They fired him?

MEREDITH
Oh my God.

MIKE
They got busy.

ANGLE on Frank, as he continues to press Halliwell.

FRANK
Why? Why isn't he here?

HALLIWELL
Frank?

FRANK
Yes, I know he's... gay. And I don't know what to do with that. Kids. But I've been thinking this over, and all I come up with is -- gay or straight, he's a damn fine teacher. And a good man. How many of those have you got? You don't let him stay. You beg him.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

The bus has arrived. Howard stands right outside the bus's open door. An older COUPLE exit the bus, dressed up and chattering, with sun hats.

WOMAN

(to her husband)

Get a move on, or we'll miss the whole graduation!

Howard looks at his watch: it is noon.

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

HALLIWELL

We gave Howard a choice, about his behavior. As I see it, this was his decision.

BERNIECE

No, I'm sorry -- it was mine.

HALLIWELL

Berniece?

BERNIECE

I wanted a wedding. Because I never had one. I thought if I just had some fuss and some flowers, well then -- I could rule the world.

HALLIWELL

Berniece...

BERNIECE

So I didn't listen. I didn't pay attention. To Howard. To my son. Who just wanted to make me happy. Who just wanted to make everyone happy. Even if it meant he had to twist himself inside out. Now I love roses, I won't deny it. But I can wait. For Mother's Day.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

The bus doors are open. Howard stands outside.

BUS DRIVER

All aboard.

Howard makes a decision. He steps back. The bus doors shut. On the SOUNDTRACK, we hear MUSIC: a familiar, insistent vamp; after a few bars we hear Barbra Streisand begin to sing the rousing "DON'T RAIN ON MY PARADE."

BARBRA STREISAND (V.O.)
DON'T TELL ME NOT TO LIVE, JUST SIT
AND PUTTER
LIFE'S CANDY AND THE SUN'S A BALL OF
BUTTER
DON'T BRING AROUND A CLOUD TO RAIN ON
MY PARADE!

Howard picks up his suitcases and starts walking, with Streisand determination.

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

HALLIWELL
Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Brackett, but this is not the occasion for debate. Today belongs to the students -- does it not?

The gay pride group reluctantly lowers its signs, and stands in silence.

HALLIWELL
As I was saying, welcome to our Greenleaf graduation. Before we begin handing out diplomas, I'd like to welcome today's very special guest. You may know him from the movies, but to us he's just our friend Cavanaugh Drake...

AVA
(in a loud whisper)
Cameron!

HALLIWELL
Cameron Drake, of Greenleaf High.

Cameron stands, as the crowd APPLAUDS.

CAMERON
(at the microphone)
Thanks. Good to see ya. But -- I don't think I should make a speech or anything. 'Cause the last time I made one, I messed up. Big time.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

ANGLE on Howard, standing in the back of a flatbed truck, as it zooms along the highway. Howard stands proudly, his chin high, amid bales of hay and flapping chickens. The Streisand song now BOOMS.

BARBRA STREISAND (V.O.)
DON'T TELL ME NOT TO FLY, I'VE SIMPLY
GOT TO
(MORE)

BARBRA STREISAND (V.O.) (CONT'D)
IF SOMEONE TAKES A SPILL IT'S ME AND
NOT YOU
WHO TOLD YOU YOU'RE ALLOWED TO RAIN
ON MY PARADE?

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

CAMERON

And now they tell me I've got to give
out this award -- Teacher of the
Year. And the nominees are...

(reading from a list)

Edward Kenrow.

(polite applause)

Go, algebra! And...

(he flips the list
over, looking for
other names)

That's it? Wasn't Mr. Brackett
nominated?

AVA

Withdrawn.

HALLIWELL

Ineligible. No longer with us.

ANGLE on Jack, Meredith, Vicky and Mike, as this news registers
on them.

MIKE

Wait -- so it's just Kenrow?

VICKY

But -- Mr. Brackett was here all
year.

JACK

Mr. Brackett's been here for twenty
years.

MEREDITH

We should call somebody!

HALLIWELL

(calling for silence)
Students? Some respect -- for Mr.
Drake?

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Howard's head and torso now emerge from the open sunroof of a
compact car. Howard raises his arm high and then bends it to
look at his watch. The song urges him on:

BARBRA STREISAND (V.O.)
I'M GONNA LIVE AND LIVE NOW!
GET WHAT I WANT, I KNOW HOW
ALL THAT THE LAW WILL ALLOW
ONE ROLL FOR THE WHOLE SHEBANG...

EXT. STADIUM

CAMERON
So the winner is...

HALLIWELL
A drumroll, please...

Halliwel motions to the drummer in the band. The drummer looks fed up; he offers ONE TAP on his drum.

CAMERON
(examining the plaque)
Ed Kenrow.

ANGLE on Meredith, Jack, Vicky and Mike. As one, they all slap their foreheads with the palms of their hands, as if wildly surprised by this announcement.

Ed rises, waving his arms, acknowledging some scattered applause. Ava hugs and kisses him. Ed steps up to the microphone.

ED
First of all, I would like to thank all of you, my students, my peers and my extraordinary wife Ava, for this incredible honor...

CAMERON
Hey, wait. Ed, Mr. Kenrow, congratulations and everything. But can I ask you something? How come Howard got withdrawn? And how come he got fired? Is it the gay thing?

ED
Oh no, no, no...

HALLIWELL
Certainly not!

CAMERON
Then what?

ANGLE on the crowd, looking at Ed. Everyone is very quiet.

ANGLE on the gay pride parade group, looking at Ed.

ANGLE on Peter, signalling his crew to begin filming again.

ED

Well, Cameron, Howard felt, the school board felt, the community felt -- it was a question of influence.

ANGLE on the school board, nodding in agreement.

CAMERON

What do you mean?

ED

It's one thing to be this way or that at home, but Mr. Brackett is -- was -- a teacher.

CAMERON

So what you're saying is, you're really worried about the students?

ED

(gratefully)

Precisely!

ANGLE on Halliwell, nodding forcefully.

CAMERON

Okay, so you're worried that if Mr. Brackett's gay, he'll send out his vibes and make everybody gay?

ED

Not exactly...

EXT. RIVER - DAY

ANGLE on Howard, standing in the prow of a small speedboat. Howard has one leg up; he looks like a combination of Streisand in her tugboat and Washington crossing the Delaware.

BARBRA STREISAND (V.O.)

GET READY FOR ME LOVE, 'CAUSE I'M A COMER
I SIMPLY GOTTA MARCH, MY HEART'S A DRUMMER
NOBODY, NO, NOBODY IS GONNA RAIN ON
MY PARADE!

As the song CRESCENDOES and ends, the boat docks; Howard grabs his suitcases and heads ashore.

EXT. STADIUM

CAMERON

So hey, how about it?
(to the crowd)

Seniors, you've all had Mr. Brackett, as a teacher. What happened?

There is a pause, as we PAN across the senior class. Nobody moves. Silence.

ON Jack: a beat, and he makes a decision; he stands up.

JACK

Well, I took Mr. Brackett's class,
and... I'm gay.

The crowd MURMURS.

MIKE

(to Vicky, impressed)
What a stud.

JACK

But not because of anything he did.
All he's ever done is -- try and help
me.

HALLIWELL

You're awfully young to really
understand his intentions...

JACK

I understand his intentions. To get
me into college. What about yours?

HALLIWELL

We only want what's best. For
everyone.

Meredith stands up.

MEREDITH

Mr. Brackett was my teacher, too.
And I'm gay.

HALLIWELL

What?

MEREDITH

If there's something wrong with Mr.
Brackett, then there's something
wrong with me. I caught it. It
rubbed off. I'm gay.

Jack and Meredith exchange a look.

VICKY

(standing up)

So am I.

HALLIWELL

Excuse me, young lady...

VICKY

I'm gay. If Mr. Brackett can't
teach, I can't graduate. I'm gay.

AVA
Oh, she is not!

ED
(to Vicky)
You're not! I know you're not!
You're -- a tramp!

STUDENT #3
(standing)
I'm gay, too.

HALLIWELL
Students!

STUDENT #4
(standing)
Me too.

Three Girls stand up together.

THREE GIRLS
We're gay!

STUDENT #8
(standing)
Gay!

STUDENT #9
Gay!

STUDENT #10
Gay!

STUDENT #11
I'm incredibly gay. I'm totally gay.
My ears are gay. My spleen is gay.
My ankles are gay.

STUDENT #12
My car is gay.

Now larger and larger groups of Students rise, all saying
"Gay!" or "I'm gay!" Pretty soon, almost everyone is standing.

ANGLE on Mike, who is still sitting beside Vicky.

VICKY
Michael...

MIKE
Aww...

MEREDITH
Sturgo!

Mike gets reluctantly to his feet.

MIKE

Awright. I'm gay. Jesus. I'm totally gay. I like guys. I'm a homo. I mean I do it with chicks, every chance I get, and I'm really good, but I hate it. I'm gay.

VICKY

(hugging him)

I slept with him, and it's true -- he's gay!

THREE OTHER GIRLS

(pointing at Mike)

Gay!

Vicky slaps Mike.

ANGLE on the student body. Everyone is now standing.

CAMERON

(catching sight of someone O.S.)

Mr. Brackett?

PAN to reveal Howard, standing beside the platform at the front of the stadium. No one noticed his arrival, but he has seen everything.

BERNIECE

Howard?

CAMERON

(gesturing to the students)
Mr. Brackett -- look what you've done.

ANGLE on the entire student body. Everyone looks expectantly at Howard.

Cameron takes the plaque away from Ed, who sputters, as Ava leads him back to his seat.

ED

But... but... they're all lying, they're idiots, they can't even add...

Cameron gives the plaque to Howard, and the crowd begins to CHEER. Cameron holds up a hand, to delay the cheering.

Cameron goes to his knapsack. He takes out his Oscar, and hands it to Howard, who clutches it in rapture. Cameron gestures to the crowd, who now CHEER WILDLY.

ANGLE on Frank, Walter and Berniece, cheering.

ANGLE on Meredith, Jack, Vicky and Mike, cheering.

ANGLE on Emily, smiling at Howard.

ANGLE on Peter, beaming at Howard.

Howard steps up to the microphone with his statuette, as overcome as any Oscar winner.

HOWARD

(teary-eyed)

Thank you, thank you all so much. I never dreamed... oh, I'm making a fool of myself. I can't tell you what this means to me. I have so many people to thank. But they know who they are.

ANGLE on Peter, grinning.

ANGLE on Jack, also smiling.

ANGLE on all the students, watching Howard with enormous affection.

Howard, unable to speak, kisses his Oscar on the top of its head. He finds words.

HOWARD

(looking at the Oscar)

Ever since I was a little boy, all I ever wanted...

(he grins)

... was to be a high school English teacher. In Greenleaf, Indiana. So, thank you.

(he looks at Cameron with fondness and gratitude)

Hey, Mr. Drake -- we won.

Cameron grins back at Howard.

HOWARD

And I guess I'd also like to say, to Emily and my Mom -- I'm just sorry that there isn't going to be any wedding.

CAMERON

Who says?

INT. CHURCH

As the WEDDING MARCH plays, the CAMERA PANS DOWN FROM HIGH ABOVE the altar. A wedding is in progress; the church is filled with people and flowers.

ANGLE on Berniece and Frank, standing by the altar. Berniece is weeping ecstatically; Frank hugs her.

ANGLE on Walter and Sonya, as a couple in the first pew.

ANGLE on Howard, in his tuxedo, beaming.

ANGLE on the bride and groom: Emily and Cameron. Emily wears her now almost completely shredded wedding gown; she is radiant. Cameron wears a rented tux, and is clearly wildly in love with Emily.

FATHER TIM

I now pronounce you man and wife.
You may kiss the bride.

As the music SOARS and the congregation CHEERS, Cameron gives Emily a major kiss.

ANGLE on a row of teenaged girls, screaming and swooning as if at a rock concert.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Cameron's plane is on the tarmac. Luggage is being loaded onto the plane. Howard is bidding farewell to Cameron.

CAMERON

So -- are you gonna be okay?

HOWARD

I think so. Just please, next time
-- just thank the Academy.

CAMERON

Got it. Oh, and Mr. Brackett?

Cameron opens his shirt. The "Sonya" in his "Sonya Forever" tattoo has been crossed out. That tattoo now reads "Emily Forever."

HOWARD

Oh my God.

Howard and Cameron embrace. Cameron heads for the plane, as Emily approaches, from the airport.

EMILY

Howard -- some little part of me is always, always and forever -- going to hate you.

HOWARD

(smiling)

I know.

EMILY

But Howard...

HOWARD

Yes?

EMILY

I think maybe -- I knew. All those years. And maybe -- that's what I loved. That you were different. You weren't -- Greenleaf.

HOWARD

But I am! That's what's so awful!

EMILY

I always thought that one day, we'd leave. I thought we'd see the world, and meet people, and seek counseling. You were -- my passport.

HOWARD

I'm sorry.

EMILY

It's okay. Really.

ANGLE on Cameron, standing at the door to the plane, with a big bag of potato chips. He motions to Emily.

CAMERON

Babe?

EMILY

(to Howard)
What can I do?

(she kisses Howard
on the cheek)
Eat your heart out.

Emily runs toward the plane, as Walter's battered pickup truck swerves onto the tarmac. Sonya steps out of the truck. Walter leans out the window, and Sonya kisses him.

WALTER

I know that, by the time you get on that plane, you'll have forgotten all about me. But from now on, even though Howard will always be smarter, and better-looking, and more popular, I'll be special too.

SONYA

Because you made love to a supermodel.

WALTER

Who got dumped.

Sonya kisses Walter again, and runs for the plane. As Walter waves to her, Peter emerges from a van, carrying his garment bag.

PETER
They like you. They really like you.

HOWARD
Bitch.

PETER
Mr. Brackett.

HOWARD
I'm learning. So -- when does this air? "Howard Brackett Revealed"? "In And Out"?

PETER
It doesn't.

HOWARD
What?

PETER
I don't want your life to be -- a scandal. An "Inside Entertainment" exclusive.

HOWARD
(disappointed)
Why not? Did you do all that snooping and prying for nothing?

PETER
(looking right at him)
No.

HOWARD
Air it. All of it. With my blessing. Because I'm not the only Howard Brackett.

PETER
Yes you are. And besides, I've got the Cameron Drake wedding, on video. You're nothing!

HOWARD
Does everybody get this? When they come out?

PETER
Get what?

HOWARD
A great-looking man? With designer clothes? And no scruples?

PETER
Come with me.

HOWARD

What?

PETER

We'll have a blast. New York.
Theater. Opera. My apartment.

HOWARD

I can't.

PETER

Why not? It's summer vacation.

We hear the strains of "THE WAY WE WERE," being played in a heartfelt but clunky marching band arrangement. Howard turns: the fully-illuminated Greenleaf High marching band is approaching on the runway, serenading him.

Meredith, Jack, Vicky and Mike move to Howard, with a gift.

MEREDITH

Go to New York, Mr. Brackett.

JACK

Tell me everything.

VICKY

We brought you something. For the new you.

MIKE

Levi's.

Mike hands Howard a folded pair of Levi 501's.

BERNIECE (O.S.)

Bon voyage.

Howard turns. Berniece, Frank and Walter approach him.

FRANK

Have a good time. Not too good.

BERNIECE

(handing Howard a folded list)

I need some yarn.

WALTER

Go for it.

PETER

(to Howard)

Howard... the people have spoken.

HOWARD

(still torn)

I don't know. I'm a small town guy,
I can't leave my friends and my
family, even for the summer, I'd be
lost, I'd miss them too much...

Peter holds up a pair of tickets.

PETER

Streisand. The Garden.

HOWARD

(to his friends and
family)

'Bye!

Peter, holding the tickets, runs for the plane. Howard pursues him.

FRANK

Son?

HOWARD

(turning)

Dad?

FRANK

•(after a beat)

Have a real good time.

Howard grins. The marching band MUSIC SWELLS, and blends into a lush SOUNDTRACK version of the song, as the plane takes off. The music turns into a bouncy rendition of "IT'S DE-LOVELY."

FADE OUT.

THE END